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CHAPTER I

APHRODITE ON THE EASEL

ONE bright April morning, not many years ago, two men, to be known for the purposes of this story as John Sumner and Ambrose Trevor, were sitting by the fire in a Chelsea studio. They had just risen from a late breakfast and were enjoying that grateful lassitude that settles alike on man and beast after a healthy meal. The blue wreaths from their cigarettes mounted lazily amongst the rafters, while they lay back in their easy-chairs talking in the effortless undertones of close intimacy.

Trevor, the owner of the studio, was a tall, spare man, with clear amber-coloured eyes, that glowed and flashed beneath arched brows, a high, blue-veined forehead receding gently under sparse black hair, and thin lips shaded by a well-pruned moustache. Altogether a face which ladies, whose judgment on such a point may be taken as approximately sound, would class as attractive, if not handsome.

His companion was also a tall man, but of more massive build; wider-shouldered, thicker-limbed, and with features more coarsely cut. There were signs of power and energy in the square contours of brow and chin; but his more flexible features quickly put on a look of indolent apathy when there was no external stimulus to move him. He had a large brain, which exacted as a chief condition of activity an abundant proportion of repose. Well rested, it threw off in hours work for which other men demanded days. Profession he as yet had none; unless the laborious and systematic collection of personal observations in all quarters of the globe for a long projected treatise on the *Labour of the World* could be dignified with that name. Stray chapters of this work had already appeared in English and German journals, and had won for their author an acknowledged place amongst the new school of political economists; but a queer smile came over the faces of John Sumner's friends when the final hatching out of the *magnum opus* was too confidently counted on by the uninitiated. For all that, however, Sumner still by fits and starts worked hard at his project. He had returned this very morning from a three months' tour in the States, spent in reviewing American industries, from oil-refining in Pennsylvania to vine-planting on the Pacific; and now, prompted by his friend's questions, he was giving a disjointed record, not of his more

serious studies, but of the incidents of his lighter hours.

"Enough of me," he said at length, dropping his cigarette ; "come, what have you to show?"

"But little. A few square feet of canvas covered to your ten thousand miles," replied Trevor, rising and placing an unframed picture on his easel. He had taken it down the moment he heard of Sumner's return, lest it should seem to clamour for instant notice like an ill-bred child ; and he now restored it to its place with a hand that trembled a little in anticipation of his friend's verdict.

"By Jupiter, what an exquisite creature!" cried Sumner, wheeling round to face the easel.

Trevor smiled strangely, "aside," as it were, to an audience in the secret. "Yes, she is an exquisite creature," he said.

After his first burst of interest, Sumner sank back in his chair and eyed the picture indolently through half-closed lids.

"Well?" asked the artist, when he had endured some minutes' silence.

"I don't make head or tail of it," said his critic. "Oh, I daresay it may pan out all right, as they say over there, but it is in the ore at present. Why on earth have you not finished it, Ambrose?"

"Some interruption came, and my humour for it got broken."

"That's you all over; you never finish anything. Your conceptions have no legs. They fail in momentum, I mean. Well, what is it all about?"

Trevor strode across the room and unearthed a thin and exquisitely bound volume from his littered writing-table. "I wonder whether you remember this in the *Byleaf*," he said; "listen:—

"It is related that when the shade of Paris came to the shore of the Styx, there appeared unto him the three goddesses whose reckless strife had been the source of all his woe. And the twain in whose hearts the anger burned ever hot against him stood gazing on him reproachfully, as who should say, 'See, now, what has come of thy unrighteous choice.' Then turned Paris entreatingly toward the Goddess of Love, but she gave unto him no heed. And while they thus stood there in bitter silence, Zeus appeared beside them and said to the two goddesses, 'Oh cruel ones, will your vengeance never be sated, neither by the anguish of your victim, nor even by his death? Surely the anger of mortals is quenched by tears, and at the tomb is changed into compassion. But your anger liveth, like you, for ever. As for this man, verily hath he his fill of reproach. Think ye, forsooth, that his lot had been less wretched had his choice been other than it was? and could he, moreover, have chosen otherwise, think ye, being such as he was made?' Upon that asked Pallas with scorn, 'Wherefore, then, prithee, hath sorrow pursued him, an he were

not lord of his own choice?" And the Thunderer answered never a word."

The *Byleaf*, it should be stated, in the days when it flourished, for, sad to say, it lives no longer, was something of a modern *Tatler* or *Spectator*, started by Trevor and his friends with the view, as its name implied, of supplementing the daily journals. Every morning it presented its subscribers with a single leaf of letter-press, printed from founts of exquisite design on the best Dutch handmade paper, and the aim of its promoters was to furnish matter of such classic excellence in thought and workmanship as to tally with this luxury of production. Short fanciful essays and allegories presenting a distant, mellow, and composed view of current problems were its specialty, but verse was not excluded, and sonnet, ballade, or rondeau was served up from time to time as a morsel of which the difficulty of preparation and digestion was assumed to compensate for limitation of quantity. Now and then the form of expression was varied, and an etching or a stanza set to music formed the *Byleaf* of the day. In every case the idea was to provide a single rounded thought or fancy—a pearl which could be dissolved without difficulty by the brain-secretion of twenty-four hours.

For a time the *Byleaf* flourished marvellously. Young poets and essayists, the blossoms of whose genius would otherwise have been left to fade in uncut volumes or

pressed out of remembrance in accumulating piles of magazines, were rapturous at the idea of having them tied with ribbons and set before an eager and vigorous morning audience. On the other hand there were many readers who were glad to take refuge from the ephemerality of the common news-sheet in a literature that purported to be written for all time. For there are people who feel that it brings them nearer to posterity to be reading the literature that it will read.

Viewed in the light of the legend from the *Byleaf*, Trevor's picture was no longer a riddle. Its central idea was obviously to give a presentment of ideal beauty, heightened in impressiveness by the sombreness of its setting. The cowering form of Paris and the regal figures of the goddesses—Zeus had not yet appeared—were only sketched in, but the Aphrodite had clearly been elaborated with most minute and reverent care. The background was furnished by the sullen waters and dark rolling mists of the Styx, with the blackness of Tartarus beyond. What light there was centred itself on Aphrodite, who faced the spectator, wherever he stood, with the soft beauty of deep blue eyes. But for a slight suggestion of shrinking from Paris in her pose, she seemed to be almost unconscious of her companions, and to be bent solely on moving you, or whoever came within her range. There was nothing of the wanton about her. She wore a loose robe of white, which left

her neck and arms uncovered, and her look was one of exquisite innocence. For, as Trevor said, one should think of the Goddess of Beauty as like the maiden that one loves. The lips indeed were full and sensitive, and seemed almost quivering with emotion, but her eyes had a mystic depth in them, as of one who has seen the wonders of another world, but none of the dark realities of this. A dove was on her shoulder, nestling amongst her loosened tresses, and in her hand she held a chain of roses—"a rosé gerlond, fresshe and well smelling," Trevor quoted, as he pointed it out to his friend. Some of the blossoms, however, had shrivelled and shed their petals where they touched the rank herbage that grew by the river's brim. Here Death peered out at one from every sort of murderous plant. Here grew the opium poppy with its white flowers and dull green leaves; here flourished the lurid beauty of the nightshade and the feathers of the dappled hemlock, with many another poisonous herb, all painted with a Dutch minuteness. In short, each feature of the picture, the Cimmerian twilight, the mists on the creeping river, the deadly herbage, the dejection of Paris, and the sullen anger of the two goddesses, seemed painted with the one object of throwing into higher relief the fresh unspotted beauty of the Goddess of Love.

"Well?" said Trevor again, leaning forward in his chair and lacing his fingers nervously.

"You want a serious criticism?"

"Your roughest thought."

"Well, then, beautiful as your lady is, she is to my mind a tissue of anachronisms—a mediæval woof shot across a warp of paganism, with the limelight of to-day thrown in. What is Una or Miranda doing by the river Styx?"

"I did not mean to paint a mediæval maiden," said Trevor, looking at his picture doubtfully.

"No; you paint one in spite of yourself. Your Venus is a woman without a history. Even a goddess's face might be supposed to show some trace of dead amours; but you have worked so long on rapt saints and ecstatic angels that——"

"I don't see why I should fetter myself with others' generalisations," Trevor broke in. "Were there no pagan minds in the Middle Ages, no mystics in Greece? Surely the two types have always existed side by side."

"Of course you have an argument ready," said Sumner, laughing; "but if you admit of a pagan type, why, Aphrodite should be the very essence of it."

"I do not care to paint a pagan Aphrodite."

"No; you are not content with beauty for itself, as I am. With you it counts only as a symbol."

"True. I look to the soul behind it."

"Yes, I know women with souls are the fashion nowadays. Happy pagans!"

"By the way," resumed Sumner, "you have not told me who your mystic Mädchen is? What fair one sat for her?"

"You don't know? Perhaps it is not like her."

"Certainly not, if she is an acquaintance of mine."

"She is a connection of yours."

Sumner raised his eyebrows.

"Miss Ida Bannatyne; your stepfather's niece."

"Ah!" exclaimed Sumner, with interest. "I have never seen her."

"She is living with your mother in Savile Row."

"Yes, so my letters said. Well, she is undoubtedly a very beautiful girl, even allowing for your flattery."

"She is more beautiful than I can paint her," said Trevor earnestly.

"With a beautiful soul too?"

"Yes."

"Look here, Ambrose, don't you be taken in. What you mean by a beautiful soul is in nine cases out of ten merely a trick of the eyelids, and a profound ignorance of the grand facts of life. Why, reading this young lady's face, I will venture to say that when the glamour of innocence—which as likely as not owes itself to your brush—has been rubbed off, you will find her a very practical and business-like young woman,

with a strong taste for pleasure and a keen eye to the main chance. So beware. Her needs will flow from no lofty spiritual ideal, such as you prize so highly, but from purely material promptings. A woman with a mouth like that—a spindle edition of my dear step-father's—may be selfish and heartless in spite of yearning eyes, and yet, kept well in hand, may get her small world's verdict as a model wife and mother. She has a Greek face behind all her mystic glamour, and quite possibly may need the treatment she would have found in Greece."

Trevor standing behind his friend's chair showed in his face the pain these words gave him, but he shook it off, and laying his hand gently on Sumner's shoulder, said, "Really, John, you are too wicked to-day. You have reverence for nothing."

"Do you expect me to go on my knees to a school-girl? No, Ambrose, I can love beauty, but I keep my worship for power."

"Beauty is power."

"Yes, for dunderheads, who let their lower cells lord it over their higher. Well, I suppose no one is to see it, as usual? No? Then you don't want a name for it?"

Trevor, anticipating more ribaldry, took the picture from the easel and turned its face to the wall. "No, no, I won't have it pilloried. Give a dog a bad name——"

Sumner laughed. "No, a good name," he cried; "give

it a good name and hang it. And call it, 'The Justification of Paris,' for I'll wager that most of us with such a Venus would have made his choice."

The characters of Sumner and his friend Trevor presented a curious contrast. The chief thing that struck one in Sumner was his massiveness, a quality which pervaded everything about him. His mind moved slowly and placidly from point to point with the same sure, even-balanced stride as his body, declining all those exhilarating but profitless excursions into the ether of fancy into which most of us are so easily seduced. He loved facts and theories which could be proved to demonstration. He held strongly that the unknown is only attainable by way of the known, and condemned with all the acerbity of which his easy nature was capable every form of superstition and transcendentalism.

His friend Trevor was the opposite of all this—a seer of visions, a dreamer of dreams, a mystic, a Platonist, who held that man had all truth within him, and needed only a certain emotional quickening to see it develop itself in tangible outline before him. He was never weary of quoting Browning's lines—

Truth is within ourselves ; it takes no rise
From outward things, whate'er you may believe.
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fulness ; and around,
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,

This perfect, clear perception—which is truth,
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
Blinds it, and makes all error ; and, to KNOW
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without.

Love and sorrow were for Trevor the sole keys to the imprisoned splendour, and the work of artist, poet, or philosopher was in his eyes only precious when sorrow or love had quickened it. He would admit that there were certain truths to be arrived at by so-called "exact inquiry," but such were truths of a lower plane, and had no currency in the higher realm of spiritual life. And yet while despising, or affecting to despise, the results of modern research, he was by no means wanting in acumen. He could make a brilliant defence of his old-fashioned tenets, and did not disdain to bring up the most startling of modern discoveries in support of his apparently untenable position. He had ingenious ways of deducing the existence of spirits from the theory of evolution, and would turn the facts of cerebral localisation into new arguments for the existence of intuitional truth. He cherished a loving faith in many things that run counter to common experience, and had a bias toward belief, if not an actual belief, in all sorts of exploded superstitions. According to Sumner he was an inveterate fetich-worshipper, but then Sumner was prone

to call everything a fetich which was mixed up with any sort of emotion.

In spite of these radical differences, the two men had for years been united in a closer bond of friendship than is usual amongst men of modern times. There was a feminine element in Trevor's sympathetic, single-hearted nature that was very attractive to the robust egoism of Sumner. The painter never jarred on his friend as other men did, but adapted himself easily to all his moods. It was very pleasant to Sumner to have his more stolid thought stimulated at times by the brightly glancing intellect of the painter, and yet to feel himself leant upon where a sure foothold was needed. It was pleasant also to have at hand some one ready with small services and thoughtfulnesses, such as one gets (and takes as a matter of course) from a sister or a wife, but seldom from any one else.

Trevor on his side had the greatest reverence—and reverence was always easy and grateful to him—for his friend's solid judgment and wide experience. Sumner indeed had had exceptional facilities for acquiring large views of life. There were few branches of knowledge that he had not studied, and few countries in which he had not travelled. While still in his teens he had for more than a year lived the life of a common workman, as engineer's apprentice, and his later prosperity had never effaced from his memory the rough experiences of

that time. They had made him a radical to the backbone. He looked forward to being in Parliament, but was in no haste to get there. He had the German respect for tireless effort, as the main condition of forming right judgments, and realising to the full the difficulty of dealing with the complexities of political science; he was disinclined to make any great effort to enter the House until he had amassed sufficient first-hand knowledge to carry him at a bound through the crowd of idle geniuses and political amateurs to an admitted place amongst the small group of serious statesmen.

CHAPTER II

"LOVE, LIFE'S CROWN"

MRS. HARVEY BLAND, the re-married mother of John Sumner, was one of those happy, pliable women who are never for long at odds with their environment, and who in consequence are able to indulge in a fine contempt for their opposites—the self-torturing, “problematic natures” condemned by fate to be “with what they most enjoy for ever least contented.” Twice had she dipped her hand into the matrimonial bran-tub, and twice, she would have told you, a prize had fallen to her share. That she should have found equal contentment in close intimacy with two such opposed natures as those of her first and second husband, is just one of those odd facts which go to shake one’s confidence in the time-honoured belief that sound judgment is a main avenue to human happiness.

Dr. Sumner, her girlhood’s choice, was an earnest man of gentle habit but of ruthless sincerity. A member of a profession which the world presses to wield a con-

juror's wand, he was careful to practise no arts of deception, even upon himself. Wide grasp of his science and a painful realisation of its difficulties bred distrust of his own powers—a distrust which his sincerity made him careless of concealing. People who went to him for the words of a master and were made the confidants of a student's perplexity, came away resentful, with minds made up henceforth to seek professors whose fallibility was less in evidence. A few of kindred earnestness, especially in his own profession, were sworn admirers, but the adhesion of the few is a poor basis for practical success in any walk of life. Dr. Sumner was not successful, except in mapping out and helping to bridge over difficulties for his successors—a work which in this world finds but scant appreciation and reward. The labouring years brought him no nearer his modest ambition of providing a competency for the threatened years of inaction; and he was sadly bracing himself up for old age and meagre fare in a cottage, with ill-equipped children fighting at odds the fight of life, when the will of a dead relative brought him unexpected relief. He became rich at a stroke. Two years afterwards he died.

His widow, who while he lived had met every disappointment with a smooth mind and borne much without a hint of querulousness, confronted her loss with equanimity; and in due time accepted, equally without

emotion, the hand and name of Dr. Harvey Bland, a physician whose success in opening the world-oyster had been as remarkable, considering his tools, as her first husband's failure. While still a young practitioner, hidden under the bushel of a small Irish practice, Dr. Bland had been discovered by a fashionable lady, and set up in town. He showed his gratitude by disclosing unsuspected faculties for shining. He stormed Belgravia with a book on "Nervousness," said by the envious to have been written for him in a week by a dilapidated genius, under the spell of "Highland Dew." Its descriptions were lifelike, and as Dr. Bland's own nervous system was known to be of iron, they gained him credit for marvellous sympathy and observation. He secured the ear and voice of the press by a bountiful table, whereat the quality of the wine enhanced confidence in his genius and admiration for his wit. The be-champagned critics cast for him a unanimous vote. They lauded his books and his flashy papers in the magazines. They blazoned forth his modest recitals of professional success, informing the fashionable world how ably Dr. Bland had guided Lady Betty Boston through a critical attack of mumps, and with what *éclat* he had delivered Mr. Justice Pettigrew of a vertigo which had resisted all the bigwigs of the profession. The comic papers made puns upon his name, and the *Rotten Row Review* gave him a further advertisement

under colour of castigating the servility of its contemporaries.

Before he had been in town a year, Dr. Bland found himself far busier than was consonant with his idea of a pleasant life, and he began to contemplate with some dread the years of drudgery before him. His apprehensions were groundless, for after a short taste of his quality his titled patients trooped off, as is their wont, to still newer lights, or returned to their old advisers; and Dr. Bland, after blazing the meteor of a season, fell back into the second rank of luminaries, retaining from the wreck of his high fortune a small steady practice amongst a few devoted adherents.

No one regretted his descent less than Dr. Bland himself. He had shown what he could do, and his ambition was satisfied. Staying at the top of the tree, he told his friends, was scarcely worth the effort. He could treat himself to the *kudos* of premiership, without being chafed to death by its taut traces. He had now leisure for his evening rubber and for pleasant and not unprofitable encounters with gilded youthdom at his club. Money did not fail him. He had discovered easier means of making it than by toiling up Belgravian staircases. His single aim now was to whitewash himself and live on terms of mutual respect with his fellow-practitioners. Never wholly forgiven, for a sheep who has bas'd himself into public notice always retains some

of his blackness in the eyes of orthodox medicine, he became more or less tolerated; and his marriage with Mrs. Sumner, on the face of it a rather unaccountable proceeding, brought him nearer complete absolution than any other penance he could have devised. It transported him, as he had foreseen, into a purer atmosphere. The house in Savile Row became the resort of a sober, scientific coterie, the members of which had been originally drawn together by ardent admiration for his wife's dead husband, and which, though the primary attraction was removed, was still held in cohesion by the slender ties of custom and convenience, and the gentle friendliness of a hostess who had no unkind word in her vocabulary, and who never overacted her humble part.

Truth to tell, the gatherings of the coterie—those Thursday evening congresses of all that was most earnest and respectable in the scientific world—were rather lugubrious affairs. The sexes mingled badly. The men hung together in knots earnestly talking together, while the women either stood hushed beside them listening, or sat against the wall wearily fanning themselves. The tittle-tattle of society and the gossip of the clubs were unknown there. It was tacitly assumed that no one would open his lips on any subject without the knowledge of an expert, and each speaker was heard attentively and not lightly controverted. There was little intrusion of gaiety or gallantry, and but

for a rare illicit flirtation over a microscope, or a shy, delightful meeting of hands upon the absorbing relics of an extinct mammal, you would have thought that these people in poring into the secrets of science had become dead to the promptings of life. But a revolution was imminent.

One Thursday evening, a few weeks before John Sumner's return, the later arrivals in Savile Row were startled to find a handsome girl, fashionably dressed in black, seated on a prominent chair, and talking with easy confidence to a group of men who stood and listened with a sort of amused submissiveness. A handsome woman was not a common spectacle at the house in Savile Row, but a handsome woman who encountered the men with frank eyes and unfaltering voice was an unimagined phenomenon. Every now and then a silvery laugh fluttered through the air, followed by the slower vibrations of male merriment. Earnest conversations were progressing as usual in other parts of the room, but the men who took part in them appeared distraught, and cast frequent glances over their shoulders at the merry group in the centre.

Hugh Sumner, a son of the house, was posted in the doorway, his hands in his pockets and his eyes twinkling with suppressed delight. Stanley Hood of the *Byleaf* came up to him with a query on his face, and Hugh burst forth—

"Isn't she splendid?—patronising these solemn fòssils as if they were you or me. Who is she? Why, Ida Bannatyne. Nice name and a nice girl too to come out of a country parsonage."

"They can turn out very crisp goods from country parsonages," observed Hood.

"Crisp's the word. The first day she came—that's less than a week ago—I told her her blue eyes were sovereignly precious. She eyed me queerly. 'Why, so are yours,' she said,—'to yourself.' Then I hinted praise of her cleverness, and said I wished I had her brains. 'Dear boy,' she sighed, 'I wish to Heaven you had.' The next day I again tried something nice upon her, but she cut me short with, 'One word, Sir Tyro: when you next wish to wheedle a girl, try praising her for what she is not.' 'I adore your modesty,' I murmured. 'Ah! now that we have found something in common,' she answered, 'we shall be excellent cronies;' and excellent cronies we are."

"I like a girl to know her points," said Hood. "Some men will tell you they prefer unconscious beauty; but they only value it as they do game, for the pleasure of bringing it down. For my part I always get on best with girls who have stood fire. I like the ease and steadiness of self-confidence. Miss Bannatyne seems pretty sure of herself."

"She ought to be. The Archdeacon was always

telling her she was the handsomest, best-bred, and best-dressed girl in the county, and to the day of his death he did all he knew to make it the truth."

"She ought to marry well."

"She means to;" and they joined the group of men round Ida's chair, whose behaviour, in spite of their scientific absorptions, was not widely different from what one might have seen a twelvemonth back amongst the curates and militia officers who formed her little court in the country.

"It is exactly what takes place with the eye," they heard a grave professor murmuring, while he beamed down upon her through his spectacles. "First, a few specks of pigment in the tissue of an invertebrate, then on and on through æons of development, till at last we find a layer of exquisitely organised nerve-tissue, spread out behind the most perfect of lenses, and safeguarded by the most acutely sensitive apparatus of curtains and shutters—each addition a new element of beauty, a pleasant sign-post to guide us on our way, when our brain goes forth in quest of that magnetic encounter with another brain, which it can only achieve through the medium of this wonderful organ."

"That's quite a new idea to me," said Ida, bestowing a bright glance on the Professor. "Are our brains really so near each other as that? Nerve-tissue spread behind a lens? Why, then, when you look into my eyes you

see my brain magnified. That is very consoling," and she laughed lightly and gave a side glance at Hugh.

The Professor made a vain attempt to set her right.

"Please don't," she cried, throwing out a plaintive hand. "I am quite wrong, of course, but never mind. Henceforth, say what you may, I shall always be grateful to my eye. Oh, but then," she resumed with a well-acted distress, "it must magnify defects as well. Alas!"

"You cannot multiply zero, my dear young lady," said the Professor, bowing with a grim smile and adroitly retiring.

A few minutes later Miss Bannatyne was called upon to sing. Music was rarely heard in the Savile Row drawing-room, where the achievements of amateurs of every genus were held in poor esteem, and where even the best expert performance would have been regarded by many as a deplorable intrusion. Ida, as she moved to the piano, had no idea of the resistance she was to encounter, and looked for fresh victory over her new subjects. She had not a powerful voice—not one of those grand voices that are perhaps a thousand times as rare as great beauty (with deference to the librettists, man is not wooed by song, nor woman either, else were our voices sweet as nightingales'); but she had a voice of pure quality, and of adequate strength and compass. She sang with taste, and had been well taught to render the passion and pathos of a song with a reserve from

which one was tempted to infer a wealth of emotion in the background. But Science saw nothing of this, and longing to be at talk again, strained visibly at the leash.

Ida was disappointed. At Eastmere, her old home in the country, Sword and Gown had gone down before her singing with a precision that left nothing to be desired. Here, the only listener whom it seemed in any way to stir was Eva Sumner, who stood watching her with large glistening eyes. And she was but a bit of sentimentality ready at any time to respond to the slightest whisper of feeling. In vain did Ida look around for another vibrating face. She put aside her English songs and began to sing Schubert's "Rastlose Liebe." Placed on her mettle, she gave it with all the feeling she could muster, and when she dashed into its last royal burst—

Krone des Lebens,
Glück ohne Ruh,
Liebe bist du, O, Liebe bist du,

she glanced up, and there standing in the doorway was the listener she had been looking for. His deep-set, glowing eyes were fixed upon her with a look almost of awe, and his whole being seemed inhaling the music of her voice. In her pleasure she let her eyes meet his for a second or two, till he looked nervously away. Then, as she rose from the piano she saw him go up to Eva, and a minute afterwards he was bowing in front of her,

while Éva said in her soft, slow tones, "Ida, I want Mr. Trevor to know you."

Women were always impressed by Ambrose Trevor. His manner towards them had a certain rare old-fashioned courtliness; his voice was musical and caressing; he received their lightest words with deference, and showed in a hundred little ways that his thought was always less upon his own feelings than on theirs. Ida found him entirely charming.

"I am glad you still sing Schubert," he began.

Ida's blue eyes again met his, and he all but forgot what it was on his tongue to say.

"Is he out of date?" she inquired.

"So they say," answered Trevor. "Your modern critics find him painfully explicit. His rounded melodies are too *banal*. He leaves nothing to the imagination, and that, you know, is a sure sign of crude art. Suggestiveness is what we are bidden most to prize nowadays. A chord or a twirl to suggest ineffable strains."

"So," said Ida, smiling and falling in easily with his humour, "the best music is never written."

"And never can be. The highest music is in us unvoiced, and the best composer is he who best knows how to touch the stops that will make it vibrate within us. 'Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter.' That is where Keats and modern

criticism have left us. Not that I do not prize reticence in art; no one values it more. But if you overdo it, you circumscribe your audience. And after all a work of art stands or falls by the number it touches."

"My father used to say that the music of the future is the music of the few."

"Of course it is when first written, for a new audience has to be educated for each advance. But the question with each advance is, Can it move more than the few? That is my measuring-rod for all art."

"A democrat," exclaimed Ida, with the slightest accent of disdain on a word which to her had never borne a pleasant connotation.

"An oligarch rather; for what is art but a government of the many by the few."

"Who are chosen by the many."

"Exactly; the ideal government."

"Some think," continued Trevor, in his fantastic vein, "that all the good tunes have been written, just as all the good things have been said. So possibly the music of the future will be, like much of our literature, a music of allusion. And just as a single page of a modern essay may carry us athwart the poets from Homer to Browning, and from Isaiah to Swinburne, so perhaps the symphonic exercise of next century will here call up the ghost of Palestrina, there the shade

of Berlioz, with mementoes of Offenbach and Sullivan thrown in as graces."

"How fond you are of paradox!"

"Why, somebody must sacrifice himself. Truth is a three-cornered constituency, in which the minority too often goes unrepresented."

So the talk meandered on, till Trevor said his good-byes in an almost empty room. Ida remembered afterwards with complacency that she had not borne her part in the encounter so badly, while Trevor walked home to Chelsea with "*Krone des Lebens, Liebe bist du*" ringing in his heart.

"Eva, your scientific friends are terrible bores," said Ida to her cousin that night. She was sitting on a low chair before her bedroom fire, clad in a soft silk wrapper, her arms clasped behind her head. Eva Sumner stood opposite to her, absently thrumming the mantelshelf. She was a small, slight girl, with a face remarkable for large earnest eyes and a gentle expression. She was short-sighted and wore spectacles habitually, combed back her hair from her forehead, clothed herself in quaint æsthetic drapery, and was altogether an odd-looking, interesting little figure, who seemed to invite good-humoured persiflage. It was a great grievance with her that so few people would take her seriously. For, indeed, she was herself extremely serious. She had high aspirations and was troubled with burning thoughts, but felt

her powers unequal to realising the one or expressing the other. She wavered between devotion to science, in some small branches of which she was fairly proficient, and surrender to religion. Her main ambition was to be of some use in the world, but like many another young lady with similar yearnings, she had not as yet found a practicable means of satisfying it.

"You must not expect men who give their lives to science," she said in reply to Ida, "to be like those you used to meet at Eastmere. They are buried in large thoughts, and have no time to entertain idle dames. What do you want of them, Ida? Would you have them prime themselves with jests, like a professed diner-out?"

"Ah! I don't think the Eastmere men did that exactly. If I recollect right that was my part of the business. Oh, your society man is not a Sydney Smith. Don't go off with that idea, Eva. I have not been out five years without learning something of the modern youth. He has not many ideas to squander on you; but he knows two things—how to dress like a gentleman, and how to behave to a lady."

Eva was mortified, and answered with some feeling, "Such are petty accomplishments, inessentials, when one thinks of the work these men are doing. There were men here to-night who are known all over Europe, whose names will be household words, perhaps, in cen-

turies to come. And yet who so humble as they? Your friends, if their coats fit and they can turn a pretty compliment, think that they have exhausted the possibilities of human excellence. Mine, versed in all knowledge, are as modest as a young girl."

"No more than that?"

"Ida, you are incorrigible. At any rate, there was one man here to-night whom even you will not venture to quiz."

"Who? Your paragon, Mr. Ambrose Trevor?"

"I defy you to find any fault in him, superfine critic that you are."

"Well, to please you, I will grant that his clothes fit, that he speaks without a twang, behaves very prettily, and does not talk down to you. I detest a man who converses on an incline."

"Ah! you do not half know Ambrose Trevor. He is not easy to place. Why, he has one of the most unique minds in London. He has a moral earnestness, a devotion to the beautiful, a faith, a sincerity, a simplicity, a sympathetic insight into other minds——"

"Little goose, you are in love with him."

"Nonsense, Ida. As if a girl may not honestly admire a man of genius without wishing to bring him down to her level."

"Love in the bud, dear. Eva, beware. It is well

your sittings to him are so nearly over. I really don't know that I ought to allow you to go again."

"Oh, I must; I promised. To-morrow is the last time, and if you go with me——"

"Yes, I will take care of you, little one. Some day perhaps it will be my turn to be taken care of. *Quién sabe?*"

CHAPTER III

A MORNING WITH A RHAPSODIST

EASTMERE, the decaying country town in which Miss Bannatyne had hitherto spent her life, enjoyed, like other places of the sort, a most excellent opinion of itself. Its inhabitants, on their rare excursions to the metropolis, walked the streets with the look of men conscious of solid endowments which, were they but known, would be seen to easily outweigh the tinsel magnificence around them. This provincial conceit is perhaps not quite so preposterous as it may seem. For there is at once a charm and a rebuke to the restless, posturing Londoner in the drowsy complacency of a country town, in its cleanliness and order, in the solemn care bestowed by its inhabitants on trifles, in the slow stolidity with which they receive new ideas, and the almost stately composure with which they translate them into action. And after all it may be questioned whether they do not draw out quite as much of the juice of life by the steady suction of the lips which

nature has given them, as we with all our steam-crushers and centrifugal exhausters.

Archdeacon Bannatyne, Ida's father, had a reasoned reverence for the Eastmere habit of body and mind. He prized the little town as a bit of the sturdy, sound old England that was, and that would be again when the nightmare of steam-engines and ballot-boxes had been lived through. In his time he had tried many political creeds, but the combined pull of temperament and circumstance had slowly and surely drawn him down to the soft couch of old Toryism, and he found it so comfortable that in time he came to believe that people who quarrelled with their bedding were prompted to it by the devil's malice.

He had brought up his daughter on the fine old crusted views of our grandfathers, which he had found so pleasing to his own palate. But Ida, from mixing much with county families, the migratory members of which are often even less provincially minded than the average Londoner, had formed her own ideas of life,—ideas which resembled those of her father in little else than the certainty with which they were held. Dr. Bland called them old-fashioned, and told her that in his house she was as a bit of granite thrown amongst the chalk. Putting adaptability aside, the simile was not inapposite. Ida, no doubt, belonged to an older stratum than her new friends. Her training had been

utterly different. At Eastmere Rectory, in her father's time, authority and tradition governed everything, and the pedestaled ideal was to act and think in all contingencies as the eighteenth century might be supposed to have done under the circumstances. To have views of one's own was set down by the Archdeacon as a certain sign of falling away either from grace or from sanity, and private judgment was not encouraged even on such an arguable matter as the time of day, respecting which the authority of that stiff-backed martinet, the old clock in the hall, was enforced without privilege of appeal. Schism in any form was a crime of such nature as to be removed out of the category of common sin.

In Savile Row, on the other hand, revolt from accepted beliefs was most tenderly dealt with, and entire freedom of individual thought and action was encouraged. Every question was deemed a fair quarry for discussion. To none was the right of sanctuary allowed, nor was any exempted, on the score of age or past services, from the liability to be carted into the field and made to furnish an hour's run. Even the divine immunity of axioms was but grudgingly conceded. Ida was struck at first almost to dumbness by the audacity with which old reverend truths were toppled over, and young upstarts from the gutter throned in their place; but with the adaptability of youth she soon developed a taste for the sport, and wore the red cap as jauntily as any of them.

What she found less easy to reconcile herself to was the total change in her manner of living. At the Rectory life had been smooth and orderly, dignified but unostentatious, refined if not particularly cultured. Though a clergyman's house, religion had not been much in evidence, and the spotless cleanliness of everything might have justified one in concluding that it was to that virtue that priority was given. The servants had known their duties and their place; the Archdeacon had kept them tightly in hand, and regulated every detail. So that at last, to his infinite satisfaction, it had become generally admitted by his fellow-townsmen that in no house was the local ideal of domestic management carried to such perfection as at the Rectory.

In Savile Row Ida found a complete contrast to the orderliness of her old life. There she met with profusion at one time balanced by parsimony at another, a show of luxury up to the drawing-room with a want even of necessities above it, absolute liberty but no comfort, an Irish thriftlessness without always the Irish lightheartedness. Meals more nearly resembled a picnic than the ceremonial observances they were at Eastmere, and the conversation across the slovenly table was often on the confines of jangling. The servants in cheap finery were as pert as they were incompetent. Everywhere there was a want of orderly arrangement, and an entire absence of the small refinements of life; whilst

as for cleanliness and godliness one hardly knew to which the palm was given, so little obtrusiveness was there on the part of either.

Miss Bannatyne was not a girl of excessive sensitiveness, but every moment of her first acquaintanceship with the Blands had its jar for some one of her habits or beliefs. She would have said good-bye to them after the first week, but her father, in spite of the house-keeping talents which during his short married life had made his wife a cypher, had not left her the means to keep up a separate home. Immersed in everyday cares, he had not thought of her future, or perhaps foreseeing a fortune in her face, he had counted on securing her happiness cheaply before entering upon his own. Ida, left to look after herself, determined to carry out this unfulfilled duty of her father's, and range herself with no more than a decorous delay. The Blands' invitation seemed to open a path towards the accomplishment of her resolve, and like the sensible girl she was, she made up her mind not to criticise the way too closely when the goal promised so well.

On the day after Trevor's introduction to her, Miss Bannatyne started off with Eva Sumner to walk to the artist's studio at Chelsea. It was a clear winter's morning, and along the Riviera slope of Piccadilly the sun shone with such a springlike warmth that bipeds of all sorts began thinking of their summer wear. It was

a day to unbutton hearts as well as coats, and as the two girls walked briskly along Ida confided to Eva the single stirring episode of her marriageable years; an episode beginning in light philanderings with a trim young soldier—a baronet's son, whispered Ida with a touch of awe—passing on to soft avowals and stolen kisses, and ending with the view of a prudently stern father on the doorstep and the wooer retreating down the Rectory gravel. In the three or four years that had since passed Ida confessed that she had never even felt her heart quicken at the sight of any one, and altogether she concluded that she was rather an inflammable young person.

They reached the studio with eyes and cheeks aglow.

"You bring me sunlight to work by," Trevor cried in his gayest tones, as he led them to their seats.

A mass of snowdrops in a silver bowl was almost the only decoration of the room. Murmuring, "I thought it barbarous to gather them till now," the artist tied some of them into a nosegay, and offered it to Ida with a grave courtesy.

"Surely Heine must have had his mind on snowdrops," he said, "when he wrote that gem of his. 'So hold, und schön, und rein.'"

Ida took the offering, and raised it mechanically to her nostrils.

"No, they have little fragrance," cried Trevor, watch-

ing her approvingly. "Heine says nothing of that. In truth they have no need of it, for when they bloom there are no rivals to them. How the bees must love them!"

He tied up another bunch for Eva, and began his work.

"Fancy yourself a bee," he went on, "an ancient bee, whom this sunny morning has coaxed out of his hive. His loves, the flowers of last year, are perished every one, and he has lived the long dark winter through upon their memory. Then one morning the sun shines and the spring draws its first glad breath; and this old weary bee begins to stretch his stiff wings, longing to be careering amongst the sunbeams and the flowers. He creeps out of his hive, suns himself a moment on the sill, and then with painful flight sets forth upon his voyage. Alas, the whole earth seems to him one vast charnel-house! Around him last year's leaves and flowers lie in their unlovely decay; the cold air is still rank with their odours. So he turns back broken-hearted, palsied with cold and despair. Then suddenly in a far corner of the garden he spies a gleam of white, a dozen airy bells swinging on their fragile stems. Quick as his aching wings will carry him, he speeds towards them. Ah, if he can only quicken his dull blood with their young beauty, and taste their maiden kisses once at least before he dies at their feet! And yet you ask why snowdrops don't smell?"

"Were they only made for the bees then?" asked Ida.

"Ah, Miss Bannatyne, isn't everything made for what loves it?"

So they chatted on; Ida leaning back in an ancient chair, her fair head against one of its blackened scrolls, smiling now and again, and showing her firm white teeth, as she shot from between them some short criticism as sharp and hard as they; Trevor nervously excited, leaping in rapid talk from one theme to another, and twirling his crayon in his hand, while his bright eyes kept settling with delight on the face of his fair visitor.

Meanwhile poor Eva sat silent and sad. The painter's eyes lost their brightness when he looked at her and put fresh touches to her portrait; he kept all their flattery, she could see, for her cousin. Never had he shown this wild emotion in talking to her. His interest in her had been quiet and self-contained; deep, she had hoped, but never impetuous. Now he seemed as if bewitched, and Eva wondered sadly what a girl must feel who by a look could thus set brains and hearts on fire. These dark thoughts cast their shadow on her face. Her mouth dropped its corners, and her eyes grew lax and plaintive. Miss Bannatyne in like circumstances would have masked her face with an easy smile; but Eva's unschooled muscles scattered tidings of every emotion she felt.

Trevor, giving the best of his brain elsewhere, had

by a few mechanical touches transferred Eva's new expression to her portrait, scarcely conscious of the change, till Ida cried suddenly, "Why, Eva, what a funeral face!"

Miss Sumner started, smiled sadly, and was about to open her lips, when Trevor broke in—

"I think Miss Sumner always looks rather pathetic. I would not have it otherwise. You have deep sympathies, Miss Eva; your thoughts are ever outside yourself, are they not? and so, seeing what misery lies around, you cannot but wear a mournful face. Let them who think of themselves look joyful, for mostly they have a pleasant theme for thought. But those who like you take to heart the sorrow of the world, get some of it written on their face."

Eva gave a nervous, deprecating laugh.

"An embodied Weltschmerz, that is what you are, Eva," said Miss Bannatyne.

"Bravo!" cried Trevor excitedly, his eyes brightly glancing from one to the other. "Yes, you personify the Weltschmerz. What a picture might be made of it! A figure standing among briars; behind her a smiling landscape reaching back into blue haze, she herself in the shadow of a lowering cloud. Schopenhauer, you know, says somewhere that man's present is always clouded, however bright with sunshine his past and his future may be. Deep melancholy, sympathy,

patience, love written on her face, with a touch of humour flickering around the lips. Hands tightly clasped before her, controlling her grief. From her waist hangs a hand-mirror of ancient date, wherein is reflected the sunshine of hope ahead.* Then a dozen vignettes around, Niobe, Gretchen, Lear, Camille Desmoulins, and whoever else is fixed in the mind of man as emblem of the thousand wrecked lives he sees around him. What say you, Miss Sumner? Will you sit?"

"I have taken up enough of your time already," replied Eva coldly.

"Why, how could I spend it better?" cried Trevor.

"Do sit, Eva," Miss Bannatyne entreated. "Don your pet greeny blue, and be an elegy in a minor key, like the lady of the gazelles."

"I am sure I have troubled Mr. Trevor enough," Eva repeated.

"Perhaps if you would sit first, Miss Bannatyne," the artist suggested.

Ida smiled a welcome to the proposition.

"Ah, that would be delightful; 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso.' For of course if Miss Sumner personifies the Weltschmerz, what is left for you to sit for but the Weltlust; the joy that blossoms at the sight of nature and of happy lives? You look, pardon me, as if you were made for a very happy life. My picture shall be a

prophecy ; for there you shall stand in the midst of laughing fields, your feet amongst the lilies, and chains of roses in your hands ; around you the ripple of waters, and the song of birds, and the murmur of bees, and all the sparkle and delight of spring. And your face shall be proud and joyful, with just a little trace of solemnity in it ; for the delight in man and nature always brings awe with it. And there shall be vignettes around ; the laughter of children, and the joy of man and maid, Kepler watching the stars, and the Spaniards standing silent upon a peak in Darien—all healthy and sober pleasures ; no uproarious mirth of drunken satyrs, or miser's midnight gloating over his gold, which ends only in bitterness. What say you, Miss Bannatyne ? ”

Trevor had walked up to her and laid his hand upon the arm of her chair, and was now leaning over her, awaiting her answer. Ida looked up at him frankly, and signified her consent.

“ A thousand thanks,” he cried. “ Had ever painter two such models ? But how to costume you !—Ah, here is inspiration ! ” and he brought a book of plates in which was epitomised all the sartorial ingenuity of mankind. Ida seized upon it with expressions of delight, and her head was soon buried in its pages, while Trevor went back slowly to his work.

“ How few men, how few artists even,” he said to Eva, “ seize the whole meaning of beauty ! They see

what is beautiful, and labour fondly to transfer it line by line to their canvas, but when you look you miss the very soul of it, the one thing that made it worth the rendering. Their painted rose moves you not like the living rose; it tells you nothing, opens views of nothing. 'Beauty,' says Goethe, 'is a revelation of hidden laws of nature, which else would remain unrevealed.' Those laws your soul has once known with delight, and now it wanders as far as its shackles will stretch, yearning, weeping, struggling to regain the holy knowledge it has lost. Then in a flower, in a sunset, in a face, it sees the revelation. For a moment of ecstasy it is back in its lost past. Faintness seizes the body, the senses reel, and for a minute even this poor tenement knows the joy of the infinite. The artist who feels all this longs to seize and immortalise the fading blossom, the vanishing sunset, and to be the means of opening to the souls of others the glories his own has seen."

Eva listened with large solemn eyes, as she always did when Trevor flew off into one of his rhodomontades.

"But if you render exactly what you see," she objected, "surely your picture should move others, as its original moved you?"

"Ah," cried Trevor, "that is the false gospel of realism, which only sees truth on the surface. The real artist is as the pearl-diver; he knows that truth's treasure lies fathom-deep. If he paints, say a young Italian

mother, just as she stands before him, the world will see a contadina and nothing more. It will see none of the holiness of motherhood, which was revealed in the depths to the painter's eyes, putting him in touch with all the mothers that have ever been. In a realistic picture, the dress, the fashion, the twist of a tress, seize upon the eye, and raise a thousand common associations which blind one to the mystery that lies beyond them, just as the importunity of a bright window lattice makes all behind seem darkness. You must unmodernise; unpolarise your model before the world can see what the artist saw through the modern blinds. That, in short, is why I ask you and your cousin to let me paint you in costume. I want to depolarise, to disindividualise you, and help men to look through the concrete beauty to the abstract beauty which lies beyond."

As Trevor's voice slackened into silence he laid down his crayon, and let his eyes dwell intently on his guests.

"Come, Eva," said Ida, taking up her fur, "it is high time we got behind our window-blinds." Then turning to Trevor she threw open the volume of plates at a plain Greek dress. "If I must be disindividualised," she began.

"An inspiration! I foretold it," Trevor broke in. "Of course, no nation ever rejoiced like the Greeks in life's joy and beauty. I will paint you as their embodiment of them. All hail, Aphrodite!"

Ida laughed merrily, and let Eva drag her away.

CHAPTER IV

IN AFTERNOON-TEA-LAND

TREVOR in one of his fanciful outpourings to Ida had sketched our metropolis as a vampire bleeding the country of its best, a Dead Sea swallowing Jordans, a whetstone for wits but a burial-place of souls, a hard stepmother starving her children. Miss Bannatyne, thinking of material appetite, had prettily expressed her compassion for the hungry, and dubbed London the veritable old woman of the shoe, who sent her surplus children supperless to bed—"on the stones, many of them." Trevor, touched by her show of feeling for the people, gravely smiled assent, but Ida in her heart was thinking, "Thank Heaven, I am not one of the whipped."

Again and again the thought came back to her, when the carriages flashed by her, when she looked down on diamonds from the dress-circle, "Thank Heaven, I am not one of the whipped, but——" The unfinished sentence indicated an endless longing for a glittering life. Indeed the sight of the bandbox exquisites and of the daily

dress-parade in Piccadilly was a constant sting to Ida, who felt that rightfully she should be amongst them, scattering smiles and gold and reaping homage. The vision of luxury which she might not share was to her as the sheen of water to cooped ducks, and she could not enter into the superfine taste which deliberately renounces it, or understand the obtrusive want of appetite for it of the brainworker. Trevor even pleased her less because he lived and dressed plainly and dispensed with a background of Eastern needlework and Venetian beakers.

Her taste for shimmer found little gratification or encouragement in Savile Row, but there were friends on the other side of her family who gave it ample countenance. Her father's sister, the Honourable Mrs. Doncaster, and her cousin, Mary Doncaster, were closely connected with many twigs of the aristocracy, and though the actual connecting-link had long since drunk himself into the family vault, his widow and daughter were still invited to mix from time to time with distinguished circles. They lived over a circulating library in the St. George's road, a neighbourhood not too unfashionable or too costly for persons of their means and pretensions. The rooms were furnished in a fashion which has some vogue amongst people on the outskirts of fashion, whose appointments, contrasted with their apparel, might lead one to suppose that they had trans-

ferred the shame of nakedness from themselves to their furniture. Everything in the room that could by any ingenuity be made to wear it was shrouded in drapery. The back of the door was decently clothed ; the easel in the corner had its gauntness swathed in yards of sea-green cloth ; a clothes-horse, which did duty for a screen, was muffled up as closely as a delicate racer ; and the jambs of the mantelpiece were trousered as decorously as any modest jamb need wish to be. Shawls and rugs were thrown over the sofas and chairs, and even the homely flower-pots, in which wan palms and ferns languished, had their blushes magnificently veiled by folds of Tussore silk. Wood in its native nakedness was nowhere allowed to obtrude itself. The whole room was an arrangement in drapery—and dirt. If London blacks had been gold dust, more ingenuity could scarcely have been spent in gathering and holding them. Oh, if our grandmothers, with their gospel of furniture polish, could only come back to rooms like these, where red blinds stand on guard against the light of heaven, and the window chinks are sealed up, and the black dust lies thick in fold and cranny, how they would stand aghast, wondering into what fresh sepulchre they had fallen !

It was in these rooms that Mrs. Doncaster lounged through her languid days, nursing her nerves and headaches, petting her dogs and scolding them by turns,

and only rousing herself into vivacity when visitors—mostly of the male sex—came in to exchange the spicy gossip of the clubs for cups of fragrant tea. She was confirmed in invalidism. Dr. Harvey Bland attributed her ill-health to the wear and tear of modern life, and prescribed “nervines,” which, he said, had fortunately come upon the scene, like a hero of romance, at the very moment with the need for them. But it is probable that a more correct view of causation and a more promising line of treatment had been indicated by a certain bluff and breezy country squire, who summed up the problem thus—“Good heavens, who could expect health in a dust-bin?”

Mary Doncaster was her mother in crescent phase. She was of the plump, bloodless type, with a pale round face topped by a flaxen fringe. She was called pretty, and believed it implicitly, spoke with an infantile lisp, and affected the manners of an *ingénue*. She mainly occupied herself in cogitating on her dress and contriving effects for the capture of unwary bachelors. She was weary of spinsterhood, and even the conscientious perusal of the society papers, on which she spent her spare hours, failed to disincline her for the parlous state of matrimony. She had no pressing sense of any duty except that of enjoying herself (which included due watchfulness over the chief condition of enjoyment, her health), but like many women of her make, she had

a capacity for clinging, and, if fate should be kind enough to attach her to a firmly-rooted stock, might conceivably blossom into usefulness.

The same could hardly be prophesied with truth of the other members of this secluded family—the two dogs, Melon and Cucumber, whose characters were so radically depraved as to present no prospect of reform. They had all the vices a dog can have. They were malicious and revengeful, cowardly, greedy, and practised in deceit. They made no show of gratitude, modesty, or fidelity, and were even without the slightest sense of humour, the possession of which has before now saved dogs and men, otherwise entirely vicious, from contempt unmitigated. Melon, the ill-bred, sandy terrier, was the more villanous of the two. When he snarled at you from under the sofa his eyes were so full of craft and malice, and the ragged wisps above his black muzzle took on such a hateful sneer, that one could scarce help being converted on the spot into a belief in the transmigration of souls. The character of the pug, Cucumber, was more or less modified by age and obesity, conditions which interfere with the practice of vice without of necessity weakening the bent towards it. His eyes, once villanous, were glazed with age, and from his mouth there lolled day and night a swollen, discoloured tongue; but visitors, who hence inferred a fatuous good-nature, were quickly undeceived if they

approached within easy range of his worn, but still mischievous teeth.

If you were rash enough to visit Mrs. Doncaster, you had a trying ordeal before you. Melon, supported by his less enterprising companion, rushed on you at your first entry, and yelped and snapped at your legs till kicked or scolded into retirement. Then from the safe retreat of the sofa they peered at you with wicked eyes, and greeted your slightest movement with a vicious growl. No look or word of kindness spent on them had ever earned the slightest recognition. Men who had fancied dogs so ardently as to have quite disqualified themselves for other walks of life had tried their best skill upon them, but in vain. They proved themselves utterly hopeless subjects of reform, and the unpleasant task of describing them has only been undertaken in the interests of literary truth, most previous writers having apparently met only with dogs of angelic virtues combined with almost superhuman intelligence.

It is not quite easy, by the way, to enter into the mental attitude of people who give house-room to animals so obnoxious. The cynic, that specialist in egoistic disorders, would probably contend that they must delight in their pets' intolerance of strangers, as being a constant soothing reminder to them that at least some of God's creatures actually prefer their

average individuality to the top of admiration in every possible department of human excellence; else would every dog that greeted a visitor with snarls, or departed in any way from an attitude of dignified observation, have long since experienced the mercies of the lethal chamber. The problem, however, is not necessarily pathological, and is certainly not to be incontinently settled by demanding a short shrift for every snarling lapdog. One can imagine, for instance, a lady of consequence on the strain to be as honey to detested callers finding invaluable allies in her irresponsible pets, whose undisguised hostilities would be to her as the Spread-Eagleism of the journals to a minister compelled to dine officially on humble pie. Who shall demand prussic acid as the penalty for such faithfulness?

Miss Bannatyne had become such a frequent visitor in St. George's Road that even Melon and Cucumber began to regard her as one of the family and to leave her skirts unmenaced, a want of attention for which she was duly grateful. She called on her relations one dark afternoon in March, and found them sitting silent and querulous. It cost her more than her usual effort to excite their languid interest.

"No men been here this afternoon, Mary?" she asked.

"Oh, men!" sighed Mary, "I give them up; they are so disappointing."

"Or disappointed," laughed Ida; "which is it?"

"Things get worse every day," Mrs. Doncaster complained. "A girl may have beauty, figure, wit, and every accomplishment, and they won't stir out of their club windows. Even money scarce moves them nowadays. I am sure I don't know what they want."

"Dear aunt, they don't know it themselves," said Ida. "They have been ruined by petting, like those sweet dogs, until nothing on earth comes up to their fancy. Oh, for some one to preach a new crusade, and take them away to learn what hardship means!"

"And the loss of female society," lisped Mary Doncaster. "Really I don't see how that would help us. There are few enough of them as it is. After all, the country is the place for marrying. Give me a dull little town, where the men are driven to it in despair."

"Like Eastmere," Ida suggested.

"Well, you might have married, you know," observed her cousin.

"I had no special craving for it," returned Ida. "Possibly rubbing skirts with the magnificent daughters of Mammon may convert me to your views, dear."

"Ah, this miserable world!" sighed Mrs. Doncaster. "When one can one does not care to, and when one cares to one can't."

"How was it, Ida?" asked Mary. "You held good cards."

"Ah! but the stakes——"

"Not worth playing for, I suppose. Well, I must say they have turned out poorer than they promised. What, have you not heard? Why, every one is talking of him. But I forget you live out of the world. He comes here this afternoon. How pleased he will be! He is still *tout à vous*."

"Poor Eric," sighed Ida. "What a handsome boy he was! But oh, his stupidity!"

"He is handsome still," said Mrs. Doncaster. "How he keeps his looks is a riddle to me. Really there is no justice in the world. Here are Mary and I living an ideally healthy, restful life; early to bed, regular at meals, and avoiding everything that can possibly harm us; and yet never out of the doctor's hands; while Captain Armstrong, with his morning nips, his midnight suppers, his cigarettes, and a dozen other indulgences, keeps the spirits and the skin of a schoolboy. Really, to see how the wicked flourish——"

"Oh, mother, is not that rather strong?"

"My dear, extravagance is simply criminal—simply criminal, I call it—in a man of his means. What can Sir Ethelbert be thinking about? And then to let the papers gossip! It is absolutely disgraceful. Listen to this, Ida, from to-day's *Rotten Row*: 'The ladies are lamenting'—that's the paragraph—'a Captain in the Rifles, and a well-known figure in the Eastmere country.'

There's no mistake, you see. 'What with his recent losses at Newmarket, and his proverbial bad luck at the green table, he must be rapidly nearing the end of his tether, which, it is whispered, was never of prodigious length.' To my mind that is pretty conclusive," added Mrs. Doncaster, folding up the paper. "The *Rotten Row* never hits a man unless he is down, or next door to it."

"Poor fellow," lisped Mary. "If I were he, some one should be thrashed within an inch of his life for that."

"Where would be the good?" asked Mrs. Doncaster. "It would put no money in his pocket. On the contrary, washing one's linen in a law court——"

The door opened and Captain Armstrong was announced. He was a tall, upright man, with pleasant, laughing blue eyes, well-cut features, and a general look of breezy health. The Doncasters always had a nervous dread of his first entry. But the cheeriness and unmodulated voice that tried them at the outset had a pleasantly invigorating reaction, which made his visits, like a cold bath, enjoyable when they were over.

His face, stern for a moment while he was repulsing the attentions of the dogs, broke into smiles when he caught sight of Ida, and he held her hand and kept his eyes upon her for a second longer than one ordinarily devotes to such greetings.

"We were just talking of you," said Mrs. Doncaster.

"Ah, you are in the fashion. Half London seems to

be doing the same," replied Armstrong with a laugh. "I suppose I have only myself to thank for it."

Mrs. Doncaster expressed a hope that things were not so bad as they were pictured.

"Well, I am afraid the pace has been rather fast," said Armstrong, "but I am not winded just yet. In fact, I shall turn over a new leaf. Yes, I have made up my mind to it."

"And pray how old may that resolve be?" asked Mrs. Doncaster. "Old enough to be out of danger?"

"Well, it is rather a youngster, I confess," he answered, glancing at Ida and dropping his voice; "a minute old at most. If some one would only take me in hand, some one whose good opinion I value. I am very tractable, I think. There is no vice in me."

Ida looked at him gravely, but said nothing.

"Of course not," observed Mrs. Doncaster drily, as if deprecating the idea that any but the virtuous would be tolerated in her drawing-room.

After half an hour's further chatter over the tea-cups, Armstrong left.

A little later Ida also rose to go. "Do you see much of him?" she asked her cousin as they went downstairs.

"He comes pretty often, and we meet him out too. He always talks of you."

"It's a way men have," laughed Ida. "Take care, Mary, he is a detrimental of detrimentals. His father

owns half Eastmere, but is still hale and hearty. Besides, Eric must be up to his neck in debt."

"How calculating you are! I never think of a man, if I have to reckon up his prospects."

"Ah, you have some one to do your sums for you. I, poor motherless girl, seem to spend my life on arithmetic. Mary, there is no punishment like poverty."

When Ida stepped into the street she found Captain Armstrong in wait for her. He came up and took her hand again.

"You will not scold me?" he said; "I did so long to talk to you."

He fell in beside her as she turned her face homeward, and Ida had not the heart to send him away.

"I don't think I ought to speak to you at all, after what I have heard," she said, in that tone of patronising superiority that Eric always associated with her. "I am disappointed."

"Oh, I'm ready enough to cry *peccavi*, Miss Bannatyne, and make a fresh start, if I can once get out of this tangle."

"The very words you used three years ago. You promised you would never touch a card or make a bet again."

"You forget the promise was conditional. I have had nothing to keep me steady. Oh, Ida, if you had but stuck to me!"

She was a little softened to him. "I don't think much of men who want a woman to keep them straight," she said. "Besides, how do I know I have been the only one who might have played good angel to you? It is unfair to pile all your sins at my door."

"Upon my soul, Ida, I have never loved any one but you. I love and worship you so now that I would dare any mortal thing to get you to think better of me." She would have stopped him, but he went on hurriedly. "You liked me a little once, at any rate you let me think you did, and I would have sworn by every word of yours. Don't you remember that evening in the garden when you put your hand on my shoulder and let me kiss you? By Heaven, you must remember. The memory of it burns me now. Indoors they were playing the 'Soldaten-Lieder,' and I was fool enough to think it a good omen. Ah, how I have dreamt of that night!"

"You have no right to talk to me about it," said Ida. "It was well I had some one to decide things for me then. I am wiser now."

"Oh, Ida!"

"Please don't say more, Captain Armstrong. You cannot bring back the old days, and I will not. Now, call me that hansom, and promise me, no more cards, or bets, or—anything you would not like me to hear of;" and Ida put out her hand with the gesture of one who would clinch a bargain, and turned towards the cab.

Eric took her hand and held it.

"Where are you staying? When may I come?" he asked.

"You promise?" said Ida, drawing her hand away.

"What is the good of promising, unless I may see you?"

"What is the good of seeing me, unless you promise?"

"Well, I promise."

"Then some day you shall see me. Good-bye."

"Good-bye. Where shall I say?"

Ida eyed him critically for a moment. "Bond Street."

Now Miss Bannatyne would not have been sorry to have had Armstrong calling in Savile Row and bringing in a breath from the perfumed world of fashion, but she was not proud of her connection with the Blands, or anxious to see Eric's trim tailoring beside the creased coats of her new admirers. So she wrote that evening to Mary Doncaster, begging her on no account to reveal her address.

CHAPTER V

DREAM-STUFF

THE next day Ida began her sittings to Trevor. The artist was in his studio at daybreak, piling logs on the fire, filling bowls with fresh daffodils, disposing rugs and furs about the floor and tapestries upon the walls. He was himself an ascetic in regard to his surroundings, and had little taste for the dainties in porcelain and embroidery which many artists think as indispensable a setting to their genius as stuffed crocodiles and bottled snakes to the fortune-teller. This morning, however, his studio looked to him a barrack-room unfit to receive a lady of delicate nurture, and he fretted at having so little time to spend on its adornment.

Ida was late, and Trevor restlessly paced the room, watching the newly-bought thermometer, retouching the flowers and the furniture, arranging his brushes, and diverting into a hundred small activities the energy that was cheated of its anticipated outlet. At length he heard wheels, and hastening out found Ida's maid step-

ping from Mrs. Bland's brougham. Ida followed. Her cloak fell back as he took her hand and showed a rounded arm, bare but for a golden circle at the wrist.

"I am depolarised, you see—half-way to the equator," she said, glancing at her arm. "I count upon a Greek atmosphere. Out here it is arctic," and she drew her furs around her with a little shiver, and passed rapidly indoors.

"Eva cried off at the last moment, and made me bring Catchpole," she explained, when they reached the studio.

She let the cloak fall from her shoulders, and Trevor looking at her felt like one between sleep and waking. There she stood tall and stately, as she came to him in his dreams, her dress a loose white robe, which, gathered up with golden clasps upon the shoulders, left bare her arms and neck and fell about her gracefully. She seemed to him a goddess, claiming knee-worship. The sight of her sent whirling through his brain a whole liturgy of devotion. He almost lost memory of the things around him, and could have imagined himself a wanderer in Paphian woods to whom the goddess had suddenly granted her gracious presence. Collecting himself with an effort, he bade her sit down, and began feverishly on his canvas, his thoughts in a turmoil.

For a few minutes the only sound in the room was the click of Mrs. Catchpole's needles, as she sat dis-

creetly in the corner knitting. Then Trevor broke the silence which threatened to stifle him—

“Have you any faith in dreams, Miss Bannatyne?”

“Not since I grew up, I fancy; but then you know I am not much of a dreamer.”

“Happily so for you, perhaps. I find dreaming a dearly-bought privilege. To have visions and not know what they mean is torture until they are unravelled or forgotten. I dreamt last night that a bird flew in at my window and settled on your chair; a jay, with a dazzling sheen of blue and bronze on breast and back. I coaxed it into a golden cage, and fed it on costly fruits. And in my dream I tried to teach it to talk to me. But though it made effort to learn, its only note was a mocking laugh. Then hour by hour while I kept it, its plumage lost beauty, and its laugh grew weirder, though still it pecked at its fruit and lovingly preened its feathers. At last one day in pity with trembling hand I unbarred its cage and let it forth. It settled on the topmost branch of yonder plane, where it was joined by a mate, and the two made soft loving sounds to each other. Then, as they flew away, and the sun fell upon their wings, I saw that both alike were splendid in green and gold. How shall I read that dream?”

Ida had listened without much interest. She thought Trevor was merely talking to amuse her, for she had

heard that painters, like conjurers, often use speech to draw notice from their hands.

"Why try to read it?" she said. "Surely dreams are but the ghosts of dead thoughts playing pranks while one's asleep."

"The accepted view; but not one that I can believe. No! dreams are what one's dear soul whispers when one's perception, closed to the outer world, is free to give it heed. Ah, how we ought to prize its faintest word! For the soul has no fetters of time or place, but can journey into the future and the past, and into countries that we have never seen, nay, perhaps into worlds that we may never visit. Its utterances are our Sibylline book. Why, in dreams men have been warned of a friend's death, and had pictured to them every stick and stone of places they had never seen! Can the ghosts of dead thoughts do that?"

"Live thought can do more," Ida observed; "picture, for instance, what never existed. The latest novel, your latest painting, is to me more wonderful than a dream."

"Please do not hint that I am painting what never existed," said Trevor, with a smile.

"Oh, you need have no doubts about my existence. I guarantee it for a fact—a fact of some interest to me."

"Ay, and to me too," said Trevor, under his breath.

"Well, and how do you read this dream of yours?"

asked Ida. "Do you really expect a bird to flutter in at your window?"

"No, no; a dream is never meant literally. Souls speak in symbols, and when they meet hereafter, hobbled no more by those fetters of language, which we find as hard to shake off as to put on, there will be no thing in the whole of God's universe which shall not find its link with some subtle thought; so that a single sign shall convey what now the freest pinioned poet can scarcely bring down to us. But for us here such speech is as hard to interpret as to speak; nay, impossible, unless emotion rarefy our spirit and carry it above its prison walls. One must be a poet to be an interpreter of dreams. In the Bible the heathen kings had to turn to the seers of a more emotional race than their own to get their visions read."

"You will have to be your own Joseph, I fancy," said Ida. "Pray don't foretell yourself bad luck."

"Ah, there is my fear. This dream now. What if the beautiful bird be the conception of this picture? Every conception is beautiful to us at its birth, but if our powers are unequal to it, or are crippled by misuse, little by little it loses its glow, till at last it stands before us a mere commonplace. Then in despair we give it up, and away it flies in worthier company, clothing itself again in beauty, till perhaps it visits another mind. Ah me, how hard to keep the glow on our conceptions!"

"I should never have weaved so much out of a mere dream," said Ida.

"No, Miss Bannatyne, but then you are not a visionary. You have the useful talents. You can practise, you know, while I only preach."

"Well, that is division of labour, is it not?" said Ida.

"Have you ever been painted before?" asked Trevor, after an interval of silence. "Often, I suppose."

"No, only once, years ago. My father brought a gentleman home one day, and in the afternoon we went out into the garden, and I sat in the corner of the old green bench under the mulberry-tree, with a pet spaniel on my lap, and he sat opposite and painted me, while Pater walked up and down talking. I was so glad to get off my lessons, for I was a lazy little imp, with a short frock and inky hands, and hair all tumbling down my back."

"Ah, delightful! And have you the picture still?"

"It is packed up safely somewhere. It is only a poor water-colour, but a treasure, for my hair was prettier then."

"Surely not," said Trevor; "but then I have never seen it tumbling down your back. Ah, let me paint you so!"

"It wouldn't be exactly Greek, would it?" said Ida, throwing a doubtful look at Mrs. Catchpole.

"It is Greek to reveal beauty."

Ida found pleasure in yielding. "I am your slave to-day," she said, beckoning her maid.

"Nay, I only claim freewill offerings."

Mrs. Catchpole came to Ida and let fall the rippling curtain of her hair around her neck and about her arms. Trevor thanked her with a smile, and once more set to work, while the maid stole back to her knitting-pins with a face like a sphinx.

Then they fell to talking again, and Trevor dropped many quaint conceits, and burst out gaily into snatches of verse.

"Oh, the sudden opening of the windows of heaven when a new thought lightens upon one!" he cried. "The flight of darkness and distress and the surge of light and happiness into one's heart!

"Then in the sudden glory of a minute
Airy and excellent the proëm came,
Rending his bosom, for a god was in it,
Waking the seed, for it had burst in flame,

Ah me! that such moments are so few. How many weary hours in stable for one Balaclava!"

"Is a conception as fatal as all that?" asked Ida, putting up her hand mechanically to her hair.

"Ah, you have spoilt it!" Trevor cried. He came behind her, and with her assent took the tresses in his hands to rearrange them, and it was only by strong constraint upon himself that he kept his lips from them.

He returned to his canvas with a sigh and worked on steadily till Ida insisted that she must go. But he tempted her to stay with fruits and sweetmeats and fair words, and Ida sat beside him and drank in sparkling draughts of flattery, and her white hands made havoc amongst the caramels; while Mrs. Catchpole in her distant corner demurely devoured the delicacies they sent her.

Then Ida went to the piano and sang songs in a low voice, while Trevor sat by listening, awestruck at his happiness, till at last she rose, and had her hair put up again, and gave him her hand to say good-bye.

"You have feasted me like the bird in your dream," she said, "and now, please, you must unlock your cage and let me go. Perhaps, after all, the jay was a symbol of me."

Her words sent a spasm of fear through Trevor's mind, and for a moment his eyes were grave. Then he smiled and said lightly, "No, you have sung to me."

"I like singing to you."

He watched her drive away with the faithful Catchpole, and came back to pace up and down his room and smoke cigarettes with restless vehemence.

CHAPTER VI

A GOLDEN RECIPE

To smile when fortune frowns is, like courage, a gift equally of backward and mature development, a sign on the one hand of low sensibility, on the other of sensibility conquered. The mass of us, evolutionally middle-aged, cannot hide our concern at the menace of danger or disgrace, for we have lost the slow sensibility of the healthy child and of the savage, and have not achieved that latest victory of nerve over nerve, control. The grown-up children amongst us and the precociously mature concur in facing outrageous fortune with cheerfulness or stolidity, but the nerves of the average man are more turbulent, and measuring others by himself, he looks for the classical expression of terror or of shame wherever life or honour is in peril.

The average man, for instance, if he had caught sight of Captain Eric Armstrong laughing and chatting in his club window, or sauntering along Piccadilly with shining morning face and a flower in his button-hole,

would have been astounded to hear that he was within a measurable distance of bankruptcy and disgrace. He would have pictured to himself his own hang-dog curl of feature in the like predicament, and taken Armstrong's wreathed smiles for a sure token of material prosperity ; forgetting that amongst the many strange fellows that nature has framed are grown-up children who will stand on the brink of dishonour as gaily as a young boy preparing for a dip in waters of whose depth and danger he knows nothing.

Armstrong was by nature still essentially a child, delighting in the moment's sunshine, and reckless of the rainy weather ahead. Disgrace might stare him in the face ; he focussed his eyes on pleasantness and shut out the stony gaze. Such devil-may-care young gentlemen get much credit for their apparent equanimity. The ladies, who, with a fresh memory of the society papers, smiled to smiling Eric from their carriages, were full of admiration for the perfection of his social mask. But in reality Eric's smiles were but the reflex of many pleasant thoughts which between them had crowded their unpleasant fellows into the background. He had known for weeks that trouble was imminent, but he carelessly put it behind him, waiting serenely for that chapter of accidents which in the romance of life so often comes in to avert a dismal ending.

He had already had several timely visitations from

the *Deus ex machina*, and he still looked for a new postponement of the evil day. This time, however, in spite of his smiles, the future began to look threatening indeed. His father had descended in the machine so often that he had long since peremptorily given it to be known that nothing on earth should again tempt him to interfere between his son and the Nemesis of his folly. A brace of maiden aunts had died and their ghosts had come down with their money-bags to keep the hero on the scene; and when these resources were exhausted the benevolent Hebrews, of whom spendthrifts buy breathing time to choke the more effectually at the end of it, had combined to keep the curtain up. But maiden aunts can die but once, and the patience of even the most complaisant Jew is no longer than the prospective purse of his *protégé*. The Hebrews would hear of no renewal of loans, and they had just presented Armstrong with the alternatives of repayment or appeal to his father. The latter, as Armstrong well knew, meant for him an appearance in the bankruptcy court, retirement from the army, forfeiture of London joys, and a life of hateful drudgery on the Eastmere estate. All this threatened him if he could not raise £1500 in complete secrecy within the coming week.

While in this strait Armstrong chanced to meet one evening a friend who had the credit of being as great a master of resources as he would otherwise have been a

slave to difficulties. To him, as a past-master in the art of getting credit while circumventing creditors, the young soldier was induced to lay bare his trouble. They had taken refuge at the friend's invitation in the smoking-room of a club more celebrated for choice wines and high play than for the selectness of its *habitués*.

"So you see there is no way out of it," concluded Armstrong. "I am booked for the Eastmere gaiters."

"Come, don't give in," his friend replied, with an encouraging hand on Eric's knee. "It is preposterous that a man with your prospects should be forced to turn bumpkin for the want of a few hundreds."

"Yes, yes, I see the absurdity of it," said Armstrong, with a rueful smile; "but laughing will not fill one's pocket."

"Is there no kind Jew left?"

"Not one. They have found out that my father may leave everything away from me. Of course he won't. He would sooner blow out his brains than break the succession. But you can't expect to beat that into a Jew."

"Can you eat humble pie?"

"I never tried it, except at home."

"Ah, that doesn't count. I daresay though they make it well at Eastmere?"

"Trust my father."

"But you have exhausted his larder? Well, once

when I was in Queer Street I ate my way out of it that way. I am not sure I wouldn't sooner have stayed there. But it is not every one who can get humble pie to eat."

"What is the use of tantalising, unless you can help me?" Armstrong exclaimed.

"Are you prepared to pay heavily for a loan?" his friend asked with his hand on the bell.

"The devil's price," replied the young soldier through clenched teeth.

"Waiter, is Dr. Harvey Bland in the house?"

Dr. Bland was in the card-room.

"Armstrong, you're in luck. Come and be introduced to the pieman. Mind not a word of business till he begins it. The old sinner stands on his dignity like a general. How on earth such men get in here puzzles me. But one's a fool to quarrel with conveniences, eh? Now, no wry mouths."

Dr. Harvey Bland was seated with his arm over the back of a chair watching a rubber. When Armstrong was introduced to him he took his hand into his own soft palm and held it for a few seconds, eyeing him steadily all the time.

"Son of my old friend, Sir Ethelbert?" he said in his suave, smooth tones. "Ah, I saw him only last week. Is he better?"

Eric was not aware he had been ill.

"A mere nothing; a little palpitation," observed Dr.

Bland. "Gouty. Yours is a gouty family, Captain. Handed down with the plate and pictures. The son steps into his father's shoes and finds them unshapely, bulbous over the great toe; but in time he grows to them. My young sir, make the most of your pump days."

Eric's friend threw in the remark that he certainly had been making the most of them.

Dr. Bland shot a quick glance at Eric. "A family trait, I suppose," he said. "Your ancestors made inroads on your pump days, and you are drawing on your successors'. Your grandson, I should imagine, will have none left. It is rough on a man when his fathers have swallowed his share of port as well as their own. Well, it's not in human nature to think of the unborn, or some of us would never be here. 'Not enjoyment and not sorrow is our——' Don't you think we might have a rubber? Will you join us, Hood? Come, you ought to know Mr. Stanley Hood; a magician who can turn words into gold. Do you dabble in literature, write sonnets to your lady's eyebrows, if she has any, or her lapdog—she is sure to have that—here is the man to cash it for you, eh, Hood?"

They played to a late hour, and ere they parted Armstrong, nudged by his friend, asked Dr. Bland at what hour he could receive him in the morning.

"Want to see me at the end of a stethoscope, eh?"

Well, do you know, it struck me you were a little out of repair. You played what I call a nervous game: too intent on your own hand. Like Nelson, you turned a blind eye to the signals. Take the advice of an old, and not altogether unsuccessful, player, and never touch whist when in bad fettle. It is far too solemn a business, not a healthy game except for the healthy."

Dr. Bland booked an appointment with Eric and strolled away with Stanley Hood.

"You are well through the crust, old man," said Eric's friend. "Familiar, wasn't he?"

"Odiously."

"He let you off uncommonly easy, I can tell you; but just wait till to-morrow."

The next day Armstrong, having primed himself with an American beverage, the name of which made larger promises than it could fulfil, repaired to Savile Row. When at last he was ushered into the consulting-room, he found Dr. Bland jotting down notes in a ponderous case-book.

"One moment, Captain," he said, "while I put a finishing touch to these notes. A most rare and interesting case, which has puzzled half the physicians in London" (most of Dr. Bland's cases had done that). "I think, however, I have got to the bottom of it. It will be a nut for them in Berners Street, and I will show them how to crack it;" and Dr. Bland closed his book and

restored it to the ranks of its companions. "And now, my dear boy. There, sit quiet like that. How like Sir Ethelbert, even to the finger-nails, *usque ad ungues*. No, not a word. I like to make up my mind unhelped. Heaps of light and perfect silence; there is the golden rule of diagnosis. Your tongue, please. Thank you. As I expected, edges trembling like an aspen. Now hold out your hand. The nervous type; trembling too, you see. Your pulse? Why, it's like an hysterical girl's."

Dr. Bland then went through various other procedures, while Eric sat nervously silent, full of irritation at being, as he thought, made a fool of, and strained almost to bursting point by the unwonted effort to conceal his feelings. But the physician would not let him off a single one of the routine tappings and soundings and testings, his exhaustive use of which gave such tremulous pleasure and confidence to his nervous patients.

"Now I will tell you what I think of you," said Dr. Bland at the end of his examination, "and then you shall say what you think of yourself. Many doctors reverse the process: first hear their patient's diagnosis and then make their own. It saves them a world of trouble, I believe, and flatters the patient into the bargain. But it is not science. You are suffering, my dear Captain, from neurasthenia—in other words, from exhaustion of the nerve-centres, due to overwork, or

worry, or, shall we say, dissipation. Perhaps one, perhaps all. Some cause there must be, for young men with tranquil thoughts escape your symptoms. Whatever it is, it must be removed. You remember your Latin: *Sublatâ causâ, tollitur effectus*. Now, my dear boy, what is it? Don't scruple to tell me. This room keeps secrets like a sphinx."

Eric was easily persuaded to make a free confession, and Dr. Bland learnt the whole extent of his embarrassment.

"Now, what is the good of my doctoring your disease, do you think, if we cannot cut off its cause at the root?" said the physician, leaning back in his chair and folding his hands. "I might give you drugs by the gallon. Many physicians would do it, without troubling themselves to ferret out a cause. But that is not my system. You must get this debt off your mind somehow. Your father? No. Your lawyer? No. Have you thought of no expedient? Dear me, this is very serious."

Armstrong lost patience. "Thank you, I will waste no more of your time," he said, rising to his feet and dropping a fee on the physician's table.

"Wait a moment, my dear boy," said Dr. Bland, grasping him firmly by the arm. "You nervous subjects are so impetuous. Here was I beating my brains to see how best I might help you, and you want to run off in a pet and cancel the result of our whole interview.

Now, if I were to go out of my track, and to become dispenser as well as prescriber, how soon do you think you could return my prescription?"

Eric stared.

"Dear me, don't you see? If I were, quite against every consideration of prudence, to lend you as much as will tide you over your difficulties, how soon could you let me have it back?"

"Ah, I understand. It is very good of you, Dr. Bland. But I see no prospect of repaying you for years. Certainly not so long as my father lives."

"And he is not much more than a score of years older than yourself. Well, we must let prudence go," said Dr. Bland, producing a cheque-book. "Now not a word must you breathe to a living soul. I am one who likes not even my right hand to know when my left is at my pocket. Besides these actions are so liable to misconstruction. I don't know what my enemies at the College would say if they were to see me writing a draft of this sort. *Fiat haustus, statim sumendus*. But they have sons of their own, and lose patience with the troubles of youth."

Eric looked on silently while Dr. Bland's white hand travelled over the cheque-book, and wondered how soon he would be allowed to escape.

"There now," said the physician, handing him the cheque. "That is a prescription that will set you right

in twenty-four hours. Please put your hand to this little memorandum—you see I charge you a moderate interest—and I hope it will not be long before I shall have the pleasure of tearing it up. And then, when you are rich again, if you have the grateful heart I give you credit for, you will send me £500 to do what I like with. My hospital, for instance, is in grievous want of funds. That is understood. And now, we have been so busy we have had no time at all for a chat, and there is a room full of people outside. You shall come and dine with me some day at the ‘Sydenham.’ We can dine well there, though it is a fogey’s club. The day after to-morrow? Capital! Good-bye, dear boy, good-bye.”

So Eric departed, with a joyful heart at having once more soared out of his difficulties with so little effort or discomfort; while Dr. Bland proceeded to enter the following jotting in a note-book provided with a patent lock:—

“Captain Armstrong, £1500. Father, Sir Ethelbert Armstrong; æt. 58. Income £8000 *circa*. Arteries atheromatous. First attack of true angina, a fortnight ago. Tuesday, April , 188 .”

CHAPTER VII

TWO READINGS OF TRUTH

YOUNG men, when a-sweethearting and holding themselves secure of an unbroken crescendo of bliss, are often counselled by cynical Benedicts to dwell on every note of their present delights, for sooner or later will come a pause and the duet will drop, with perhaps a slowly resolving discord, into the minor key. The advice is good and kindly meant, but not always easy to follow. For Benedict allows himself to forget the brief minor interludes and discords of his own courtship, and learns to look back upon it as all a sunny pastoral, melodious throughout with ripples and warblings and all the sweet chorus of June. But for lovers by the brook the sun does not always shine, the birds do not always carol as gaily as they might, and it is felt to be quite a halcyon day when the actual out-tops the ideal.

Trevor in his growing devotion to Ida had as yet met with no such qualifications to his happiness. Miss Bannatyne had now sat many times to him, and he

CHAPTER VII

TWO READINGS OF TRUTH

YOUNG men, when a-sweethearting and holding themselves secure of an unbroken crescendo of bliss, are often counselled by cynical Benedicts to dwell on every note of their present delights, for sooner or later will come a pause and the duet will drop, with perhaps a slowly resolving discord, into the minor key. The advice is good and kindly meant, but not always easy to follow. For Benedict allows himself to forget the brief minor interludes and discords of his own courtship, and learns to look back upon it as all a sunny pastoral, melodious throughout with ripples and warblings and all the sweet chorus of June. But for lovers by the brook the sun does not always shine, the birds do not always carol as gaily as they might, and it is felt to be quite a halcyon day when the actual out-tops the ideal.

Trevor in his growing devotion to Ida had as yet met with no such qualifications to his happiness. Miss Bannatyne had now sat many times to him, and he

found each succeeding visit excelling his programme of it. She seemed to him more beautiful in form and spirit, more worthy of worship every time she came. Nor was his felicity broken by any of those pangs of disappointed egoism which so often qualify a lover's rapture. For Trevor's love was not, like much that goes by the name, a mere compound of elemental passion and tickled self-conceit. What he asked of love was that it should draw his spirit upwards, not in order to give him a wider prospect of his own perfections, but to bring him nearer to the gates of truth.

Ida too was happy. No one would have said more biting things of the artist's ethereal passion, if it had had other object than herself; but, as it was, she relished to the full the never-failing incense. For even the most limited woman, and Ida was far from that, likes to be loved without limitation. Trevor's studio with its new luxuriousness was home to her after the bareness of Savile Row; it recalled the refinements of her old life, and swelled the longing to regain them. She was interested, too, in the painter's work, liked to study the technicalities, and to learn to talk with easy familiarity of "texture" and "modelling" and "chiaroscuro." For with all her practical leanings, Miss Bannatyne had some hankerings after culture.

Meanwhile the picture progressed more to her satisfaction than to Trevor's. It did justice to her

actual features, but not to the *eidolon* in the painter's mind. To him it became clearer with every touch of his brush that his latest work was miserably barren of that which alone makes a picture worth the painting. It was simply a truthful presentment of a handsome English girl masquerading in a Greek dress. There was no deeper meaning in it, no revelation of hidden laws, no shadowing forth of mysteries. The painter often stood before his canvas in dumb distress, relieved only by bursts of self-reproach. "A fine painter, forsooth—a true lover. And love was to open all truth to him; yes, signboard truth like that. Coxcomb, cease to cudgel thy ass's brains."

Then one dark, distracted day, while aimlessly turning over a volume of the *Byleaf*, he lighted on the allegory of Paris on his way to Hades. It touched his artist's instinct, and brooding over it, his senses seemed suddenly to quicken, and there came to him a revelation. The figures started up before him, and in the midst of them there stood, in clear definition, the image of the woman he loved. She was no longer inarticulate, no longer breathed nothing to the soul. The gloom around her gave her beauty mystic speech. Quivering with excitement, he hurriedly sketched out his conception, in dread of finding the life pass from it before he could obtain a record.

Then, still at white-heat, he began his picture. He

secluded himself from every one, and spent every minute of the lengthening days in working out his conception. Some of its beauty eluded him, and many times he girded at his technical deficiencies. But at length the goddess stood forth upon the canvas astounding him with fresh calls upon his love. Even the disdained study of *Ida*, from which he had worked, caught some of the glow, and seemed to him more worthy of his model and his brush. Then he set himself to complete the design. He ransacked *Covent Garden* for roses, and in the herb-garden close by got leave to gather what deadly plants had yet unfolded their leaves. He stood by the river in the twilight and watched the full tide begin its slow ebb ; and once he stood and watched so long that the black patch of *Battersea Park* with the lurid light behind it seemed to him the very realm of *Pluto* ; until a belated steam-launch panting home recalled him to himself, and he turned on his heel muttering, "Fit craft for *Charon*."

While his work was in progress he made no attempt to see *Ida*, though now that she seemed to be unsealing his eyes to mysteries, his love was greater than ever. But he dreaded all distraction till he had fully realised his idea.

Aphrodite had received almost her last touch, and *Trevor*, with some slackening of purpose, was beginning to devote his brush to her sister goddesses, when he

was handed one forenoon one of those orange-clad missives which are as mosquito-trumpetings to dreamy life. He tore it open and read, "Come to me, please, this afternoon.—Irene."

He fretted and pulled his moustache angrily over the telegram. But in the afternoon he ordered out his brougham, and was driven across the river and through the sordid purlieus of Lambeth, until he drew up before a large sombre building which announced itself in gilt letters to passers-by as "St. Paul's Hospital."

Like many similar institutions of recent growth in London, St. Paul's Hospital owed its birth more to private ambition than to public spirit. "It was founded mainly through the exertions of Dr. Harvey Bland, in the first flush of his early success, before his ambition had as yet fallen foul of his love of ease. Failing to gain a footing in any of the established institutions, he resolved to draw the sting from the jealousy of his *confrères* by starting a hospital of his own. In these days, so many are the sins and self-indulgences that cry to charity for a covering, it is not difficult for a clever doctor with a loyal following to found a hospital. Dr. Bland had at that time many influential friends amongst the wealthy, whose belief in him was stimulated by the sneers of his own profession ; whilst his brother-in-law, the rector of Eastmere, could bring to his aid the finger of the church, without which no charitable pie can

make a decent appearance before the world. Promises of support flowed in, and ere long the daily papers were begged to announce that a hospital had been founded for the special treatment of the nervous diseases of childhood, a hitherto strangely neglected branch of medicine, and that the Committee had had the good fortune to secure the professional services of Dr. Harvey Bland.

The hospital at first found humble lodging in a small house in Lambeth, but it quickly emerged from this provisional stage and proceeded to house itself handsomely. A pushing secretary was chosen, and no means were neglected by which the claims of the institution could be made known to an open-handed public. The first stone of the new hospital was laid by one Royal Highness, and the wards were declared open by another. Fancy fairs and concerts, at which the most beautiful and notorious members of the aristocracy displayed themselves, were organised, and the pen of one of the most picturesque of journalists was enlisted in its support. Wherever you turned "nervous childhood" tugged at the strings of your heart and of your purse. Science spoke for it by the pen of Dr. Harvey Bland in the monthly magazines; it came boldly before society, hand in hand with titled ladies, in the *Rotten Row Review*; its weird eyes peered at you from woodcuts in the *Baby's Journal*, and whined for help from every

hoarding. Considering its affliction, nervous childhood made an astoundingly brazen appearance before the world.

As the institution grew and flourished, men with a cleaner record than Dr. Bland were tempted to join its staff; and when at length ward was added to ward, and the hospital, renouncing its specialty, widened its doors to the full measure of human disease, Dr. Sumner, that *preux chevalier* of the profession, was induced to become a colleague of Dr. Bland's.

But, as so often happens in this graceless world, the more the hospital succeeded, the more its real founder was thrust into the background. Dr. Bland and his friends were swamped by their new allies. Work in an unsympathetic atmosphere began to pall upon him, and in a few years he resigned his beds, and retired, with a sense of relief, to the less arduous position of a governor, making room with a grand air for younger talent.

Dr. Sumner's last service to the hospital before he died had been to persuade a trusted friend of his, Miss Elizabeth Trevor, better known to the charitable world as Sister Irene, to reorganise the nursing of the patients under her own superintendence. It was this lady whose summons had torn Ambrose Trevor, her nephew, from his occupation on the vesture of the queen of heaven.

On his arrival at the hospital Trevor was shown at once to the Superior's private room, a lofty chamber,

lighted by two large curtainless windows of ground glass, and bare of all show of comfort or culture, with the exception of a few lithographed Madonnas in cheap frames hanging upon its cold gray walls.

Trevor had not long to wait before his aunt appeared. She was a tall, upright woman, with hair just showing a streaking of gray beneath her well-starched cap. Her features were refined, but hard, except when lighted up by one of those beautiful smiles, the use of which she knew too well to squander needlessly. She had a soft, clear voice, but spoke with a business-like precision which did not seem to match it. She was known and valued at St. Paul's as a capable woman, with a gift for managing people of both sexes, but with a certain frailty of temper, which sometimes stung her into words and actions of the sort that qualify for sackcloth and ashes, and a somewhat too extravagant idea of the claims of her office, which led her now and then to interfere unnecessarily with other people's.

Trevor had regarded his aunt with much respect and some awe from the hour when he first remembered her, a beautiful girl in evening dress, coming to his cot-side and putting her cold lips to his forehead. An orphan in his grandfather's home, a rambling manor-house near Dover, he would gladly have given her the whole affection of his heart, but she froze his caresses. Then, still hungry for some one to love, he had gone away to

school, and had seen her but rarely for some years, until, hurriedly brought home one winter evening, he found her standing in white hood and apron by his grandfather's deathbed. "I leave all to you, Elizabeth," he remembered the old man whispering. "The boy is a wayward dreamer, no more fit than his father was to handle capital. Be his banker. Share alike, a pound for you and a pound for him, so long as he does nothing to disgrace our name. Promise; a Trevor's word." Miss Trevor kissed her father, and gave the promise. Ambrose still had a vivid memory of the grip of the old man's claw-like hand upon hers, as he sank trustingly under the waters of death. Ever since Irene's promise had been strictly kept. Trevor's allowance would have covered tastes twice as extravagant as his, but it was galling to a man of his sensibility to be dependent on the caprice of even so uncapricious a woman as his aunt.

The business for which Trevor had been summoned to the hospital was speedily transacted. Irene was in want of money to meet the current expenses of her Nursing Association, and having already heavily mortgaged her property, now proposed to sell certain outlying parcels of land. Trevor demurred to the proposal, and offered to supply his aunt's needs out of his own allowance. But in the end Irene's stronger will prevailed, and Trevor gave his consent.

Then she turned the conversation to himself, and he

told her of his friendship with Miss Bannatyne, and of the picture still wet upon his easel. He had long given up all hope of obtaining his aunt's sympathy for his pursuits, and he made his recital more as a matter of duty than of inclination.

"I cannot approve your mode of life, Ambrose, as you know," she said when he had ended. "We shall never agree on that point. I think you are frittering away gifts given you for a higher use. Be as successful as you may, the world will be no better for your efforts. Art has lost its virtue since it cut itself off from religion. Your altar-piece in the chapel here, for which we thank you daily, is the only work of yours that has served a sacred end. Ah, were I a man, I could not divert myself by spreading colours and stringing words together when there are millions pining in darkness and distress! You seem to me, for the last few years, to have been living a life of selfish absorption in your studio, as though there were no hovels around you full of misery and crime. You shut your eyes to all higher obligations. Come, look here;" and she walked swiftly to the window and threw open its one movable pane.

The drunken shrieks and hoarse cries that were muffled before now burst full upon them, and Trevor could almost feel the air of the crowded court below breaking in foul waves against his face. There was an unwonted buzz and turmoil there. A policeman had

just emerged from one of the low doorways, bearing in his arms a tiny figure in drenched smoking clothes, and was stolidly forcing his way through the crowd. From a gin-house at the corner a sodden woman staggered, her apron at her lips. She reeled up to the policeman while the women shrieked and swore at her. Then she fell on her knees, clutching at the child. The policeman pushed her aside with his knee, and came on steadily with his burden. Trevor sickened at the sight and turned away.

"A story of every day," said Sister Irene sadly. "A child burnt to death, while the mother is drugging her wretched brain with gin. And men with wits and strength like you sit idly in your studios painting heathen goddesses and nursery idylls! You say it's truth you seek. Why, there is truth—there, down there. Paint scenes like that, to stir the world as it stirred you, and I will embrace you as a fellow-worker."

At another time Trevor would have had much to say upon his aunt's conception of the province of art, but now he took his leave of her, silent and sick at heart. As he came downstairs, the burnt child was being brought along the corridor. To escape it he turned into a side-room. On the table there lay a girl in drunken hysterics. Her head, with its matted hair and crushed bonnet, was propped upon a block of wood; her feet hung over the table end, the boots, in their last stage of

ruin, almost dropping from them. A young man was standing over her, flapping her bare chest with the end of a wet towel. Trevor looked at him, and recognised Hugh Sumner.

"You here, Trevor!" the young man cried. "Come and take a turn at the towel. I am dead tired. She's pretty well come to now, but ten to one she will be off again directly, and then for more delicate attention. Ah! there is nothing like wet huckaback for showing the nerves their master. Get up, baggage. Oh, you're wet about the neck? Well, here's the dry end of the towel. Now off with you as straight as your tipsy legs will carry you."

Hugh's tone roused all Trevor's anger. "Man, man," he cried hotly, as the girl shambled away, "you are kicking her farther downhill, when you are here to give her the hand of help. A human being still, poor lost sister, with a soul from the same heaven as ours."

Hugh frowned and said nothing, but he underlined Trevor's words in his memory, with a view to some future day of reckoning.

CHAPTER VIII

A DISARRANGEMENT IN SAGE-GREEN

"A FASHION is like a cholera wave," said Dr. Bland at table one day; "it leaps the Channel, pounces on London, saunters down into the country, and sooner or later mysteriously takes itself off. I wave it an *au revoir*."

"We don't see the back of some so readily," observed Ida.

"I was thinking of epidemics, dear niece; the hoop, the ruff, the hair-pad, which come and go like comets. Of course there are endemic fashions, too. Male modes, I think, are mostly endemic. Men, you see, take a fashion lightly, and are slow to shake it off. How many years is it since we caught the swallow-tailed coat? In fashion it is woman who's the radical."

"The monotony of our lives," sighed Mrs. Bland.

"Why, fashions are our only almanac," said Ida. "Your 'Hermit' year is our crushed-strawberry season."

"Ah, my dear girl," exclaimed Dr. Bland, "it is your rackety friends who change the fashions, not the sober

stay-at-homes. Look at Eva, now. She will be happy in the same sage-green swathing for the rest of her natural life."

"Not if I can help it," said Miss Bannatyne to herself.

"Now there's an endemic," Dr. Bland resumed. "It springs up here in England, no French accent about it, picks out certain spots and clings to them. You don't meet it in Belgravia or in Bermondsey. It is essentially suburban. It still smoulders in out-of-the-way places where life is tranquil. You sprinkle ridicule broadcast, but the germs still live."

"Who ever killed a fashion by laughing at it?" asked Ida.

This slight conversation preceded the serious attempt at conversion resolved on by Miss Bannatyne from the very moment that she first set gaze upon her cousin's limp and sad-toned apparel. Eva Sumner had adopted the æsthetic mode as representing an enthusiasm rather than a theory, but, though like most enthusiasts, she thought more of the strength than of the grounds of her belief, she could when hard pushed give chapter and verse for it out of her physiology primer.

Miss Bannatyne, however, in conducting her missionary enterprise, was careful not to give openings for a scientific discussion in which she felt she might easily be worsted. She brushed physiology lightly aside, and

directed her arguments more to Eva's vanity than her reason.

"The race to the altar is so hot nowadays," she said, "that no girl can afford to handicap herself. Who would suspect a witching little figure under all those puffs, Eva? Such mummy clothes may suit cart-horse girls, but a thorough-bred figure like yours, dear, wants neat harness—the neater the better. No, Eva, we are not such fools as you think. Our fashions will see yours out. Generations of experience have taught us that female flesh calls for frank tones. And whalebone, dear. 'Liberty' don't become a young woman; as they say in the play."

Eva smiled at the *double entendre*. "Your corset, then, is doubly a fetter," she said; "a sign of slavery to masculine taste."

"Why, taste is always a despot, who turns his back on argument," replied Ida. "But I have not found you resisting its tyranny in other directions. Oh, you don't mind obeying your own taste, you say. That is not quite the height of unselfishness, is it? I should have thought an altruistic little person like you would have preferred to consult the taste of other people."

"The laws of health are above the laws of taste," observed Eva, and proceeded to lead forth her physiological array.

"Isn't it also a fact of physiology, as you call it," asked Ida, "that woman yearns for man's approval?"

"You are arguing for the nose-ring," said Eva.

"No, Eva, I argue for the wedding-ring," retorted Miss Bannatyne. "Don't think to drive me from my thesis. Man's taste is the proper criterion of woman's conduct, all the world over. I have my whole sex at my back."

"Ah!" cried Eva, "it is that that keeps us down; but we can wait."

"The sex can, dear; you can't," observed Ida.

So the fencing went on for days. In the end, however, Eva's defence suddenly collapsed, and she allowed herself to be led off in triumph to Miss Bannatyne's dressmaker.

But Ida was not yet satisfied. The arrangement of her cousin's hair displeased her. "Of course it's delightful to have a clever forehead," she said, "but the best thing a woman can do with it is to hide it. It's not nice to be always advertising your ability. It scares the men. Besides, it is sacrificing a beauty. Believe me, Eva, left to themselves, nape and forehead are our weakest points; well toiletted, our strongest."

Eva again yielded, and under the blandishments of this new Delilah, submitted her locks to the scissors and the curling-tongs.

Then more fruitless struggles, till her spectacles were Eva's only stronghold. "You forego your youth, Eva,"

said Miss Bannatyne, "as if Time had no revenges. Spectacles at twenty mean the rouge-pot at forty." So a *pince-nez* was purchased; with which last sign of her victory the beautiful priestess expressed herself content, and pronounced her convert at length in a fit state to enter the fold of fashion.

It must be admitted that Eva would never have fallen so easy a victim but for the operation of a force of which Miss Bannatyne suspected nothing. It had long been one of Eva's dearest thoughts that she honoured Trevor and read his finely-strung nature better than any other person in the world. Every act and word of his was sure of her sympathy and approval, and all she said and did herself was tinctured with the longing that it might seem good in his sight. Trevor, on his side, was not insensible to this subtle, silent flattery. Ever since Eva had left the schoolroom he had relished his talks with her. The large grave eyes, that seemed to absorb all he said, as the still dark tarn absorbs the sunbeam, drew forth the best that was in him. They encouraged earnestness rather than stimulated to smartness, and his conversations with her had none of the doubtful aftertaste that Trevor often felt when he had been beguiled into those slights to truth,—those refractions from straightness,—to which brilliant talk often owes much of its sparkle.

But besides this, Trevor had a sincere esteem for

Eva's character, and made no effort to conceal it. The earnestness and sincerity she had inherited from her father, were qualities which the artist was quick to detect and eager to commend. He took an interest in her studies, and willingly assumed the office of directing her more serious reading. He lent her books and discussed them with her, encouraged her small essays in literature, and indulged her with a hundred of those slight attentions which fond mothers smile upon as the preludings to serious courtship. So to Eva there came the rosy hope that Trevor's spirit was nearing her own, and that some day, to be cherished in memory for ever after, the spark that should blend two hearts overcharged with tenderness would flash from his eyes to her own.

Then Ida had descended upon them, with her well-preened beauty, her sedate assurance, and her rapièr flashes of speech and feature, and had seized on every corner of Trevor's being. Eva was grieved almost more for his sake than for her own. She recognised all her rival's points, was pleased to watch her fresh beauty, admired her bright intelligence, and envied the composure with which she could handle a team of courtiers. But she at once divined that this young daughter of Mamón—the *sobriquet* was Ida's own—was no fit life-mate for Trevor; that though for the moment she might sting his intellect into brilliancy, it was not in her to spend herself in keeping his genius steadily aflame. So Eva

possessed her soul in what patience she could, waiting for the moment when the lover should awake from his enchantment and discover the hollowness of his idol. Meanwhile, she could not help copying the idol's excellences. She tried to act Ida's composure, to mask her feelings and to smile sedately, but her nerves proved arrant rebels to the unwonted discipline. She essayed smart speech, but suddenly became conscious of its rudeness or its ineptitude, and stumbled miserably into blushes.

And yet her first *debut* in her mother's drawing-room as Ida's convert seemed to promise success. The Professor, whose spectacles were of high power for discerning female beauty, grinned at her and menaced her with a playful finger, simpering, "Ah, Butterfly!" Men came up smiling to talk to her, from whom hitherto she had seldom received more than words of formal courtesy, and Hugh's young friends persisted in boring her with feeble chatter. And then, such is the subjective influence of a fine costume, she found herself talking with an animation and *aplomb* quite new to her. But, in the midst of it all, it was for Trevor's approval that she waited.

At last he appeared. When he caught sight of her he knitted his brows and looked grave, but talked to her kindly for a few seconds before he passed to Ida's side. Then Eva grew depressed and pensive, till

suddenly her interest was excited by an incident whose meaning she sought in vain to unriddle. Ida was at the piano singing a serenade which had just seen light in the *Byleaf*, Trevor standing over her. Eva had the words of the song by heart; she knew them for Trevor's, they breathed his very spirit. Half-way through the song Ida looked up, and saw something which astonished and perplexed her: her voice faltered and for a second rang untrue. Eva followed the singer's eyes, and noticed that Dr. Bland had just come in. Beside him in the doorway stood a blonde young man of soldierly bearing, who was watching Ida with a gaze as perplexed as her own had been. Eva looked back at once at Trevor, but he stood by the piano with eyes half-closed, basking in the music. Nothing, clearly, had disturbed his rapture. When later on the new-comer was somewhat drily introduced to her by Miss Bannatyne as Captain Armstrong, an old Eastmere friend, Eva felt instinctively that complications were ahead.

Armstrong had dined with Dr. Bland at the Sydenham Club. The physician had been extremely entertaining, had rattled off anecdotes which would have raised guffaws at Armstrong's mess, had recounted some strange professional experiences which would have astonished the *habitués* of the Divorce Court, and had ended by introducing his guest to some magnificently polite old gentlemen.

"And are you joining the profession, sir?" asked one of them.

"No, indeed, Sir Luke," Dr. Bland broke in; "my friend Armstrong is in training for a better business than ours. He begins where the best or the luckiest of us leave off. Born like your son, sir, with his thesis in his mouth. No *wooden spoon* in his class list."

Sir Luke raised his eyebrows.

"In training for a baronet," Dr. Bland explained, "though he has not yet got his degree. Good-bye, Sir Luke. Now, Armstrong, come home with me for a cup of tea. The Club brew is detestable. You see we are all for science here, and tea-making is one of the fine arts."

Armstrong knew nothing of the ties between Ida and Dr. Bland, and was disquieted to find her singing to a room full of guests in the physician's house. As soon as she left the piano he went up and took her eagerly by the hand.

"And so you have found me at last?" she said.

"Ay, where I least expected it."

"Oh, is it merely a lucky chance then? I decided when I saw you that you had hunted me down, tracked my cab, set detectives after me, advertised in the newspapers. And after all it is only a common accident."

"Mayn't there be more than accident in it?" asked Eric gravely.

"Oh, they have laughed me out of all those superstitions here. In this house, between ourselves, they have a creed of delightful brevity—'I believe in myself.'"

"Make it your own, and I am your convert. How did you come here, though?"

"I forget; it seems so long ago. In my aunt's brougham, I think. Dr. Bland is my uncle. And you?"

"Your uncle is a friend to whom I owe a great deal."

"Another creditor?" said Ida playfully.

Armstrong's face gave signs of confusion, and Ida broke in, "Well, we have a new bond of sympathy, such as it is."

"I need no fresh bonds to bind me to you," said Eric.

"Ah! now you are talking nonsense—the one thing that is bad form here."

"But I may come here and see you sometimes?"

"You may ask my aunt, if you like. A chaperon with a birch rod, I warn you: a very Cerberus to impenitent young red-coats. All hope abandon, unless you are armed with a clergyman's certificate. Come and make a contrite bow."

"Who was the dark man by the piano?" asked Eric as they passed up the room.

Ida looked at him for a moment from the corner of her eye. "A certain young high priest from Eleusis," she said.

The guests soon thinned, and Trevor was as usual amongst the last to take his leave.

"And when is the world to see your pictures, Mr. Trevor?" Mrs. Bland asked him as he stood making his adieux.

"When it cares to seek them out," Trevor replied; "I shall never make a public show of them. I believe that courting the public eye has been the ruin of art."

"It is a thousand pities they should not be seen," said Mrs. Bland.

"Oh, we must convert him, must we not, Eva?" Miss Bannatyne exclaimed.

"I should not like that," said Trevor gravely. "Whatever one's creed, one always loses something in changing it."

Eva, looking up, met Trevor's eyes, and she knew at once that her appearance on the boards of fashion had not his approval. She spent half the night in the depths of self-abasement, upbraiding herself as "renegade," "weakling," "pervert," "Goth," and when the morning came did penance in the saddest and oldest of her æsthetic frocks.

"I am only fit for degraded tints," she said to herself with a rueful smile.

CHAPTER IX

ENTER THE THREE

"JOHN ought to be home soon," said Mrs. Bland to Ida one morning. At that very moment the wanderer was comfortably seated in Trevor's studio eyeing Miss Bannatyne's portrait and summing her up as a beautiful creature in need of discipline. It was exactly a week since her other lover, Armstrong, who adored her beauty, but thought of discipline only in connection with scarlet rank and file, had discovered her at Mrs. Bland's piano.

"We will go to meet him and bring him home in triumph," cried Ida, counting on another captive.

"My dear, he won't let any one do that, ever," said Mrs. Bland. "He hates being gushed over. At the smell of the fatted calf he would call for a cab and be off again. He looks in after breakfast some morning, says, 'Good-bye, mother; I will write from Bucharest,' and you don't see him again for weeks; till one day, when he is quite out of your mind, he strolls in unconcernedly with a bare 'How d'ye do?'"

"What a very unpleasant person!"

"No, my dear, he is the best man in the world, if you only humour him."

"No man should need humouring."

"You won't always think so, Ida," observed Mrs. Bland, whose whole life had been laid down on quite the opposite assumption. "It's our only weapon."

Ida's lips curled into the faintest indication of a sneer.

"It's always the way with you young beauties," said her aunt; "you think that bright eyes and soft hair will win you everything you want. But when you have been married a month, you will find a little diplomacy and quiet persistence——"

"If ever I marry," Ida broke in, "I shall look for a husband who will humour me."

"Then you had better not think of John, my dear."

"You don't encourage me to."

"But really, Ida, he is the best of men. I never had a moment's trouble with him. He never came home in disgrace or ran into debt, like poor Hugh. He always knew what he wanted, and generally got it. If it was out of reach he didn't make frantic jumps and then abuse it for 'sour grapes.' He gets everybody to do as he wishes. There's no resisting him. You will feel his influence, my dear."

Ida gave a scornful little laugh.

"John's a born ruler of men," continued Mrs. Bland, with a mother's complacency.

"Not therefore a born ruler of women."

"He's one that always knows his own mind."

"Married, he will do well to know his wife's mind as well."

"Ida, your ideas are shocking. A good wife has no mind."

"Exactly ;" and Ida dropped the hopeless argument.

Miss Bannatyne's singing was becoming a valued feature of the Thursday evenings in Savile Row. She was educating her hearers, and they began to know her songs and ask for them by name. When she sang "Haidenröslein" with a piquant archness, their eyes glittered and their heads involuntarily copied the tilt of hers. At Mignon's song their faces testified their capacity to enter into Mignon's suffering ; each revealed his own reading of "Sehnsucht." Probably the language in which Ida usually sang had a good deal more to do with the rapidity of her conquest than she suspected. In our scientific circles German is a synonym for "beyond criticism" ; a German discovery is something that may be safely taken on trust. Home products are looked on with suspicion until the Fatherland has pronounced upon them ; even that good genie of the knife, antiseptic surgery, met a cold reception in England until Munich students had "hoch'd" its master. But

Ida's songs now stood no longer in need of such adventitious support. Germany had once more made good its claim to reverence.

This Thursday evening Ida chose for her first song a beautiful little lament of Franz's. Trevor had not yet appeared, and as Ida sang she kept an eye upon the doorway. She had superstitions about that opening, began to think of it as a frame through which, Faust-like, she would see what Fate had in store for her. Her fingers lingered on the closing chords and as yet the doorway had been blank to her. Then the Professor came up to thank her for her song.

"It is beautiful, like all you sing," he said to her, "but no, it is not true to science. What a pity it is these composers don't know their physiology! We shall never get impeccable music till Art makes herself the handmaid of all the sciences. You know very well, dear Miss Bannatyne, that nothing depresses mental vitality like sorrow; yet here you have a young woman overwhelmed by a sea of grief, giving vent to exquisite strains, such as could only come from a brain brim-full of energy. A triumphant love-song, a song of victory, is true to science, because there the imagination is exalted, the brain a furnace showering forth sparks; but sorrow is inarticulate, or at the most equal to a monotonous 'otototoi,' for then the brain is only dull red, and has no sparks in it."

"You mustn't put too many scientific shackles on music, Professor," said Ida. "Music should represent the whole of life, and I don't find life all a triumphal progress."

The Professor's eyes twinkled. "Of course, if you say so, dear lady——"

Ida looked up with a smile. "Now you shall have a song after your own heart," she said, as she glided into the brook-ripples of "Wohin." She had scarcely begun to sing when she glanced again at the door, and now three men were standing there, each with his eyes fastened upon her. There was Armstrong on one side and Trevor on the other, and between them a tall, almost burly man, who seemed to overshadow them both. And as she went on with her song the rest of her audience passed entirely out of her consciousness, and she found herself singing to these three only. Her glance had been but for a second, yet their faces had stamped themselves so vividly upon her vision that she could mentally compare the fine nervous features of the artist, and the frank, everyday face of the soldier, with the rougher contours of the new-comer. "Of these three, which?" she asked herself.

To Ida's surprise, as soon as her song was over, and while the murmurs of applause were still vibrating around her, the unknown came up to her and held out his hand. She gave hers with a pretty air of astonishment.

"I think we hardly need an introduction," he said, looking at her with an admiration that he made no attempt to conceal. "I am John Sumner."

"Ah, how stupid of me! I might have known it. They warned me that you would come like some Zanoni, when you were least looked for. Is that the way of the world-citizen?"

Sumner found her a chair, and seated himself with leisurely composure beside her.

"The empire's large enough for me," he said. "Either way one scarcely seems important enough to have a parade made of one's return."

"It's a question of likeableness, not of importance."

"There I shall hope for Miss Bannatyne's suffrage."

"On hearsay?"

"Oh, I can wait."

"They tell me I shall feel your influence."

"Do they? We'll hope so. But action and reaction are equal, the mathematicians say."

"H'm! Is that how the iron pot consoled the pipkin?"

Sumner laughed, but made no effort to answer her. He sat silent, composedly scanning her profile.

"How came you to know me?" she asked at length.

"Trevor introduced you to me this morning."

"What! Ah, the portrait. Tell me, now, how do you like it?"

"It's quite the best thing he has done. It was bound

to be, of course. But now I have seen you I think a gay background suits you best."

"Why, the background was to be gay."

"Then he has changed his mind. It's Trevor's way. In his work, I mean. It is a mere question of *chiaroscuro*, I suppose; what one calls a Rembrandt effect. He evidently thinks you shine best out of darkness. There I can't agree with him."

Ida made a faint sign to Trevor, who was hovering near. "You have a confession to make, Mr. Trevor," she said.

"I?—a confession!" exclaimed the artist.

"Yes, make a clean breast of it, Ambrose," said Sumner. "Not content with turning an archdeacon's daughter into a heathen goddess, you have set her down on the road to a place where I am sure no archdeacon's daughter was ever seen before."

Trevor laughed. "I will not confess anything," he said, "till you have seen my sin, and then I shall kneel for absolution."

Sumner rose and Trevor took his place. "No one else has seen the picture," the artist said, "and no one shall, till it has your approval. It was painted for that."

"Not a very high ambition, I fear."

"The highest," said Trevor, looking at her earnestly. "I follow the best artists humbly. Think of the crowd

and you will paint like the crowd, and leave them untouched. Paint for your one ideal critic, and you paint for eternity, and in the end you will touch the eternal in every breast. There lies the Perugian secret. The aristocratic and the democratic in art join hands."

"Over a paradox."

"It is not one to me. I cannot paint for the modern market-place."

"And yet paint for the market-place of the future."

"Ah! we can't help what happens when we're dead. But living I will not paint for gain. Every day I thank Heaven I need not. Poverty has made great artists, but marred them too."

"Oh, poverty is loathsome," said Ida feelingly. "I have been spoilt myself, but I have seen what poverty means. We had curate after curate at Eastmere, each with a wife more haggard and harassed than the last. I have watched the daily stint, the cold mutton-bone with the hungry children round it, the hourly combat with the grimy, pilfering servants, the worn stair-carpets, the shiny dresses that no lady's-maid would wear, the groans over each bill and tax-paper. Oh, if there is any misery on earth, it is that of a poor man's wife! Is it not, Captain Armstrong?"

Armstrong was hovering near, eager for a smile or word of kindness. "I have had no experience that way," he answered simply, and moved away.

"No, nor I," said Ida, turning again to Trevor, "but it is not necessary to have felt poverty in order to fear it, is it?"

"Certainly not. I can imagine it perfectly well. A woman's promise only stands between me and penury. But a woman amongst a thousand. I think I am safe."

Ida was mystified. "Women are capricious," she observed; "one must not build too much upon their constancy."

"Ah! I have a better creed than that," said Trevor.

Eric meanwhile wandered unhappily amongst the guests, craving for that word alone with Ida which she was equally intent on avoiding. At last opportunity was kind to him. Ida had to go to her boudoir for a song. As she came downstairs Armstrong was on the landing. He seized her hands in his and held them. The music fluttered to the ground.

"Ida, why are you so cruel?" he asked, with his face close to hers. "You madden me."

Ida was all but laughing outright at his theatrical airs, but she controlled herself, and said with as much dignity as she could muster, "Let me go, Captain Armstrong. Would you have me more cruel?"

Eric's hold relaxed. He looked at her wistfully. "How I have loved you!" he murmured.

"Don't let us quarrel, Eric," she said with a touch of

playfulness. "Be a good boy and I will be your best of friends."

He seized her hand again and would have raised it to his lips, but she snatched it away, and flinging a laughing glance at him, passed into the room.

CHAPTER X

AT THE OFFICE OF THE "BYLEAF"

IN the days of its best repute the editing department of the *Byleaf* lived, so to speak, over the shop. Later on, when symptoms of decline were already apparent, the journal spread forth its plate-glass to the Strand, blared out its name in a symphony in black and gold, and received its contributors in rooms which bore ample testimony to the editor's vivid appreciation of luxury and comfort. But at present it had not grown out of its first humble cradle,—a close, narrow den tucked in between the glare of compositors' gas-jets and the huckstering clatter of a Soho street. It was a squalid, whitewashed little cabin, with scarcely more than room enough for a couple of high stools and a double counting-house desk, over which flared a bare gas-flame, surmounted by the charred relics of a cardboard shade. In one corner a cramped little fireplace and a chair with one arm offered a mockery of comfort to limbs stiffened by long occupation of the stools.

In this tiny chamber, bare, close, and squalid as it was, tradition said that bygone journalists had wielded a far-echoing quill. And now it had become the birth-chamber of many a tight-packed sonnet and piece of well-turned prose, which may look perhaps for a lasting voice in literature; while other offspring, less fit to live, there had their young life strangled out, and littered the worn floor-cloth with their mutilated remains. For amongst the earliest aspirants to a place in the pages of the *Byleaf*, the struggle for existence was savagely severe and the waste of life appalling.

When the idea and the opportunity were yet fresh, contributions poured in so thickly that the editors found little call on their own creative powers. Ushered to the critic's chair, they made it a very throne of Minos. They were great purists as to style, and past-masters in the art of verbal criticism. Get vigorous and original thought by all means if you can, was their creed, but always insist on the highest craftsmanship. Under such censors it was surprising how many productions were thrown aside, or sent back to their authors with an array of gentle hints, because their construction had not the pellucidity, or their style the polish, or their rhymes the accurate correspondence that the high standard of the *Byleaf* exacted.

On the Thursday evening which had seemed to Miss Bannatyne so pregnant with destiny, Trevor

and Sumner left Savile Row together, and crossing the glare of Regent Street, plunged into the narrow darkness of Soho.

"Hood will be waiting for us," said Trevor. "He has given me trouble of late. Absorbed in my work, I have left too much to him."

"You could easily do that," replied his friend; "one has to keep hand and eye on a man of his sort."

"Oh, he is a good fellow at heart," said Trevor, "but his temptations are not ours. I own he is difficult to work with. The *Byleaf* has never cost him a shilling, and yet he grumbles about the lack of profits and the tax upon his time."

"Bah! he makes it pay him well enough, you may swear, or he would not cling to it so closely. I hear he is boasting everywhere of his connection with it, and only to-night some one complained to me that Hood kept his best work for you and foisted off his rubbish on other people."

"Why, we never printed but one thing of his," cried Trevor, "and that was half yours, you remember."

"Exactly," said Sumner. "Why not get rid of him?"

"Impossible. It would be ungenerous. At first I could not have done without him, and now that everything is working smoothly——"

"Well, if you don't get rid of him, it will end in his getting rid of you."

"Never!" exclaimed Trevor, as they turned into a gateway and mounted the well-patched stairs that led to their office.

Stanley Hood was a little, lively, dark man, with a hooked nose, bright eyes, close-trimmed hair and beard, and a manner that was meant to be winning. Some one had once described him as "a small Mephistophelès on wires," but the relaxing influence of years and stoutness had of late somewhat marred the aptness of the simile. He had a brain that bubbled over with schemes, none of which he had the perseverance to carry through. No one quite knew how he made his money, but he spent it freely—on himself. Never were two such strange yokefellows as this bustling, eager little man, with his soul intent on gain and notoriety, and the visionary Trevor, living in the thoughts and holding the ethics of a forgotten age. Each was constantly giving cause for irritation to the other, and it was only by dint of a strict division of labour that they were able to work in any sort of harmony. Hood relieved the artist of the more mechanical part of an editor's duties, but he made it a constant grievance that Trevor and his friends allowed his voice so little weight at those solemn juries before which the candidates for admission into the *Byleaf* came up for judgment.

The two friends found Hood perched on one of the stools with a plateful of oyster-shells and an empty

tankard beside him. He was talking, as usual, to Mr. Bowley, the printer's reader, who stood with his hand on the door-latch, as if to emphasise the temporary and privileged nature of his appearance in the editor's sanctum. He was a snuffy little man of comfortable build, who habitually wore a shabby hat of antique fashion. It was said at the office that Mr. Bowley had never been seen without his headgear, except by his wife, now some years deceased, and his hatter, who, to judge from this specimen of his wares, might very well have followed close upon her.

"You come *à propos*," cried Hood to the two friends ;
"Bowley is primed with good advice for you."

"Oh dear, no ! gentlemen," exclaimed Mr. Bowley ;
"that's an article I don't deal in. I ain't one to poach on other professions. It was only a humble opinion I was venturing."

"A rarer article by far," said Sumner drily.

"Well, Bowley," cried Hood, "let us hear this rare humble opinion of yours."

A shade of ill-humour flitted over the reader's beery face.

"It's none the worse for being humble, gentlemen," he said with dignity. "Maybe it's as likely to come right as one that's more stuck up. Cocksure ain't always first at the winning-post. Ah ! a thing don't lose nothing by being humble."

"That's true enough, as you put it," observed Hood.

"Ay, and a person don't lose by being humble, neither, Mr. Hood," said Bowley. "It mates with honest mostly."

"Why, so it does, in the grammar," was Hood's rejoinder. "But don't make it too humble, Bowley, or it will never show its face. Out with it; never mind its blushes."

The reader's warm-toned countenance, veined like a red map of a well-watered country, broke into a smile. "Blushes!" he chuckled. Bowley's blush was a standing jest in the establishment.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, taking his hand from the door and rising to the full height of his small stature, "it's concerning this *Byleaf* of yours. It's sound, good stuff, no question about it, for them that can stomach it, and there ain't a better read or better printed paper in England, though I say it. But it's too tall for me; it's up in the air over one's head."

Trevor smiled and threw a side-glance at the reader, as if to say, "Good man, it is none the worse for that."

"Ah, gentlemen," Bowley went on, "but the reading that we love is that as is on a level with our hearts—reading that has romance in it. That's where the *Byleaf* fails. There it's out, sir, my humble opinion."

"Romance you want, Bowley?" said Hood. "Then we must come to you for it."

"Ah, you are chaffing now, Mr. Hood," cried the reader, with a husky chuckle. "Me? Nay, it's not my business to sell my heart out in snippets. We poor beggars may at least keep ours safe and snug under waistcoat. But it's there all the same; write straight for it, and you'll hit the bull's-eye. See if you don't. What's life without romance? Why, gentlemen, it's the flower in its button-hole."

"A flower that's rather given to run to seed," observed Hood.

Mr. Bowley's face again broadened into a grin. "Egad, gentlemen, that's true—true as gospel," he cried. "I have seven at home myself and four buried, all out of one sweet, beautiful bit of a flower,—a flower that has faded and gone." The reader stopped for a moment and sighed, but speedily recovered himself. "Ah! our own little share of cooing time in Battersea Park or Epping Forest don't last for ever, and then we must come to borrowing. What is it, sir, do you think, keeps the poor starved workers quiet? Beer, you say. Well, maybe it's beer, and maybe it's rum, and maybe it's romance. I'd sooner put my money on the romance than on the beer, and if you are thinking to rob the poor man of the one, you will have to come down handsome with the other. Ah, the swells don't know how much they owe to gentlemen like you! Perhaps if you didn't satisfy curiosity about their gilded saloons and

their Lady Flora's beauty, there are many would be knocking some fine afternoon at their grand porch-doors to see what they are like."

Sumner, smoking his cigarette by the little fire, seemed to be yawning over this lengthy monologue, but suddenly he broke out: "The old hateful doctrine. *Panem et circenses*. Amuse them, to stop perverse questions. Any glitter but that of the money they make."

"I didn't know we had a Socialist amongst us," said the reader, nettled by Sumner's outburst.

"Oh, we are all Socialists nowadays," Hood hastened to put in, "only waiting for a quiet day to share our savings amongst you all, if you will let us off the barricades. It's a mere question of time."

"Ah, there's always a good time coming to every poor beggar," said the reader, "and I make bold to hope it is coming to the *Byleaf*, gentlemen. Only do step down a bit. Think it over, Mr. Trevor. Let us have something thrilling, to fill the young ladies' eyes with tears."

"Why so tear-thirsty, good Bowley?" said Trevor.

"Oh, I ain't so fond of tears; I have seen too many in my time, Mr. Trevor. But I know what moves the heart, and what's more, I know this, that if you want to get to the pocket it's the heart you must go for;" and Bowley slowly shuffled out of the room.

"There is a good deal in what Bowley says," Hood

remarked after a pause. "One may be too classical for one's audience. If you write over people's heads, well, as old treble X observes, you will write over their pockets."

Trevor made no reply. He was sitting on one of the high stools, absorbed in adorning a stray sheet of paper with intricate arabesques.

"Then you cannot expect to circulate widely," Hood went on, "unless you make your paper better known. It is simply a craze of yours, Trevor, not advertising. Look how the other papers puff themselves; yes, and other things as well, and make a deuced good thing out of it. Conducted on its present quixotic principles, the *Byleaf* can't succeed."

"Well, then, it must fail," said Trevor, finishing his design with an irritated stroke, which split his quill. Then, with more suavity: "We have done very well, Hood. Surely it is a thing to be proud of, to bring out the only paper that leans on no adventitious support, and makes no appeal to grosser natures."

"We have only scored a *succès d'estime*, next door to a failure," said Hood; "and in another six months we shall not be able to boast even of that. Contributions are falling off, circulation hangs fire, we shall soon have to double our payments to contributors, and yet you will persist in your suicidal policy. Why, only yesterday, Fipley, the publisher, told me he would take 5000

copies and circulate them at his own expense, if we would notice his last work. And it was a book you might have praised with a serene conscience. But of course I had to refuse."

"Trevor is right," said John Sumner confidently. "No one would ever have made the offer but that the *Byleaf* has won a reputation for absolute honesty. A single word of praise from it would carry further than columns of eulogy in other journals. Every one knows that you are not to be got at. But a reputation of that sort is easily killed, and then you are just where the rest are."

"I daresay that's all true," replied Hood. "But is success possible with our present policy? Look at the rubbish they are sending in now. Here are some 'Lines on a Chippendale Chair,' ending up—

"Thou precious scroll,
That may have rubbed the nap from Newton's coat,
Or kissed the flaxen head of Fanny Burney's doll.

"And here, listen to this—

"BATTERSEA PARK—A NOCTURNE.

"Moon, shower thy mellow music ;
Your tremolo of sheen
Scatter, sweet choiring stars ;
For here, I ween,
Here midst the drowsy deodars
Is audience digne ;

and so on. How on earth are we to go on if we draw no better stuff than that? Why, we might run a comic paper from our waste-basket."

"Never mind, Hood," said Trevor; "it is a proof of literary activity. There will always be bushels of mud for one diamond. It is one of the conditions of its production, and must not be quarrelled with."

"You were not at Savile Row this evening, Hood?" said Sumner, wearying of the discussion.

"Oh yes; I never miss a Thursday now. But I had to come away early to see about this proof,—literally to tear myself away. There is a new attraction there since you left us."

Sumner nodded.

"By Jove, there is a grand creature for you," Hood rattled on, "a perfect picture of physical health and beauty. A trifle supercilious perhaps, but——"

"Had we not better be looking through some of this rubbish?" asked Trevor, with a tight rein on his voice.

"She is, no doubt, a very charming person," said Sumner.

CHAPTER XI

JOHN SUMNER TO THE RESCUE

"A LITTLE Paris article, deftly finished, but of doubtful wear; a neat bundle of indecisions, who can make up her body better than her mind." Such was John Sumner's verdict on Miss Mary Doncaster.

Ida, to whom the unchivalrous sketch was presented, feebly defended her cousin. "I thought philosophers like you prized typical specimens," she said.

"Oh, I recognise her value as a type," Sumner answered. "The more abundant a species the more important is a specimen as a specimen, but the less so as an individual. Number gives importance to the least admirable class. Society is pervaded with Mary Doncasters. One soon has by heart their common formula, and passes on to the study of rarer types. Most minds," he went on to say, "fall into two classes—those that like making themselves up, and those that hate it. I think, on the whole, I prefer the former. Yours is of that class Ida."

He had swiftly advanced to the privilege of calling her by name, and treated her with a composedly superior familiarity, which, Ida thought, was the exact counterpart of her own manner towards his brother Hugh. He was standing on the drawing-room hearth-rug, towering above her as he buttressed a broad back against the mantel-board. His whole bearing, as he looked down on her in her low chair with sleepily-amused gray eyes, was that of a master of the situation, enjoying gentle sport. Strange to say, she did not resent this attitude of his. It was a refreshing variation on the general deference, and reminded her somewhat of her father in his less priestly moods.

"Thanks; I think I prefer it myself, on the whole," Ida replied, with a slight mimicry of his superciliousness. "Certainly I am not one of those who revel in indecision and make parade of an open mind. I know the class well; one meets many of them here. People who profess to be always in terror of some bogey bit of evidence or other, and pose as waiting to make up their minds till the bogeys have fought it out among themselves."

John allowed her to see that he was amused. "Dear simple agnostics," he said. "The scientific idea is a big mouthful, and paralyses the feeble mind. Wide-awake, courageous intellects like yours and mine swallow, digest, and come for more. We fear no bogeys; we love to

settle problems and put them on the shelf. The active mind delights in a puzzle that looks just soluble. When you worry out the acrostics in the *Rotten Row*, you exemplify a phase of the scientific spirit."

"Yes," said Ida quietly, "I like to make up my mind on things. So long as one gets somewhere near the real answer——"

"After all," John broke in, "in this large universe what one simple personage decides and does is of infinitely small importance. Not that it may not be of infinitely great importance to other simple personages. In the atmosphere of Savile Row, Miss Bannatyne's views and decisions bulk very largely—largely enough, in the eyes of some of us, to eclipse the discovery of a new force or the birth-throes of a new nation."

Ida saw a good deal of John Sumner now, and began to grow vividly conscious of his power to influence her. He was the first person she had met since her father died who made her uncertain of herself, the first of whom she could conceive it possible that he might have force enough in him to permanently modify her views or her conduct. When he was with her she began to notice flaws and unevennesses in what she had previously deemed the rounded perfection of her philosophy. In a few terse, cogent words he could make things appear before her in a novel light; he seemed to reveal reason fighting by his side and left her convinced. Afterwards

however, when she re-marshalled his words, she often found herself unable to restore either their cogency or the submissive mood in which she had received them. Her ideas fell back into their old direction, like a warped plank set free. Sumner's arguments, no doubt, lost a great deal when he was not present to enforce them; for he had the orator's gift of speeding them with a twist that made them bite. He knew instinctively how to adapt his arguments to his audience. Ida never found him talking, as Trevor did, over her head—an experience which considerably heightened her estimate of his talents, for she was always tempted to class as nonsense what was beyond her comprehension. Trevor's talk, when not fed by his usually intense conviction, was apt to become stilted and involved. Sumner's never was that. His conversations with Ida were mostly characterised by a steady undercurrent of sound sense, veiled by surface ripples of genial gaiety.

Sumner meanwhile had formed a very clear estimate of Ida's limitations, and he made no effort to conceal it from her. He did not, however, think the less of her for them. What he asked of women was that they should be beautiful and vigorous, and should jar on none of his sensibilities. He liked them to be quick-witted and responsive, but not subtle or large-minded. Earnest women he avoided as bores. Emotion was to him a luxury of life, not a necessity; it was useless as regards

the needs of the organism; the best that could be expected of it, and that was not often secured, was that it should not interfere with the natural processes of health. Except in connection with courtship, where it gave wings against obstacles, it was an embarrassing element in the relations of the sexes, not, as Trevor foolishly thought, a consecrating one. Sumner laughed to scorn his friend's idea that it was woman's holy office to quicken one's thoughts, and enlarge one's moral vision. "I am perfectly satisfied with my mental processes as they are," he once said to Trevor. "They won't work the surer for your feminine champagne."

What Sumner did require of a woman he found in Ida to perfection. He was a man who had seldom failed to obtain what he coveted, for he enjoyed a clearly focussed image of his wants; and while he never stirred himself to follow what seemed either unattainable or of doubtful worth, he spared no effort to gain an end, when he had made up his mind that he desired it. He had not seen Ida three times before he resolved that she should be his wife. Reason and feeling both pointed her out to him as a good undeniably worth striving after. She owned everything he wanted in a wife, and would make an ideal partner for the rising politician he meant to be. He pictured her the perfect mistress of a small salon. The gracious presence, the fine manner, the quick intelligence and collectedness were all there,

marred by no tiresome originality or flighty enthusiasms. She was one of those paragons of her sex—a woman one could count on.

“By the way, Ida,” Sumner resumed, “I wish your mind made up on a matter in which I am interested. In fact I am here this afternoon on purpose to speed the process. I see you are a governor of St. Paul’s Hospital. I suppose you have been summoned to the meeting to-morrow.”

“Yes, I have had a card. The Archdeacon wished me to continue his subscription ; but it never occurred to me till lately that it implied a privilege. Dr. Bland said something about my going, but did not know whether it would be quite *en règle*.”

“Oh, go by all means. He is on the right side for once. It is rather a delicate matter. Trevor’s aunt, you know, is the enemy. I thought perhaps he had been canvassing you.”

“No, he will vote for his aunt ; but he had scruples about influencing me. He wants my unbiassed judgment.”

“Scruples ! Yes, Trevor deals in scruples. I have none. Bah, it’s enough to know the facts. See here. When I left last winter everything was running smoothly ; I come home in the spring, and find a deadlock. Sister Irene had become aggressive, wanted to saddle her nurses with half the doctors’ duties. The

doctors had made asses of themselves and stung her into further aggressions, and the Committee were afraid to hold the balance between them. I soon got most of them to see reason, and we decided that Irene and her nurses must go unless they withdrew their claims, and promised to have done with them for good. She refused point-blank, and her friends have got a meeting of subscribers summoned to decide who is in the right—she or we. I admire the boldness of the move, but if it succeeds it will go far to ruin the hospital. It's a question simply of who is to be master."

"I am not disposed to like Sister Irene," said Ida.

"Oh, you may like her or not as you please," cried Sumner, "but pray don't underrate her. She is a woman of true grit; bound to come to the front in any situation. She would have shone equally as a tragic actress, a leading political woman, or the manageress of a monster hotel. The only *role* she is not fit for is one where her hands are not free. It is curious, isn't it, how obnoxiously aggressive women become when banded together and dressed in authority? They are docile enough isolated at home, but directly they are harnessed together they clutch the bit and bolt over hedge and ditch. They won't see that the coachman is a necessary part of the concern; that his hand and judgment must be trusted if you are to travel safely. They are always treading on your toes and usurping your authority, and

then crying out you are no gentleman if you resent it. I suppose they have not yet evolved that abstract sense of fairness, which makes us men respect our neighbours' landmarks."

"You have a low idea of women," said Ida.

"Of course," Sumner replied, "that is exactly why I have gone to all this trouble to explain the affair to one of them. Nay, I love woman by the fireside," he went on, with a kind look at Ida. "I love her calm stateliness, her repose, her tranquil gestures, the soft sweetness of her voice, as of one sitting above the storm. But I confess I don't think highly of her capacity for the forum, or the city, or any place where cool sense and tolerance are wanted. You don't either, or else——"

"Or else I am not the sensible girl you took me for. You see I always get scent of your nice sayings."

"Exactly. I like women who spy one's compliments afar off and run to meet them."

"The best steal up in the dark and come on you unawares."

"Nay, the best of all pass by you unawares. Then I may count on your vote?"

"Any line that you take, the sensible girl that I am will follow."

The next day, when Dr. Bland and his niece alighted at St. Paul's Hospital, they were met on the steps by an excited little gentleman, who piped to them—

"Where's Sumner? Not with you? Good heavens! where can he be?"

Neither Dr. Bland nor Ida could satisfy the plaintive inquiry. "Come, come in; please don't loiter," the little man cried. "They are having everything their own way; absolutely everything. All her friends there and none of ours. Oh dear! he has got us into a hole and now lets us stick there. Where on earth can he be?"

Dr. Bland and Ida followed their agitated conductor to the board-room, and made their bow to the russet-faced General, who, in eyeglass and black skull-cap, occupied the chair.

"Their man," whispered the little gentleman, pointing to the chair; "they wouldn't have ours at any price."

Irene was seated by herself in a corner, her hands dropped on her lap, her gray eyes fixed on distance, and her tight lips with difficulty pressing back a smile. One of her friends was on his feet, now pouring out angry disjointed accusations against the Committee, now dropping into pathetic periods when he touched on the single-hearted devotion of Irene and her train. He soon sat down amidst the clapping of hands and the triumphant glances of moist sympathetic eyes. Then there came a lame apologetic speech from a thin member of Committee, whose quavering voice and sway-ing figure reminded Ida of a reed in difficulties. He was listened to with impatience, and above the faint

applause and whisperings which followed, the chairman's high-bred voice was heard suggesting preparations for a division.

Dr. Bland whispered to Ida in a fine brogue : " Nothing for it, my lass, but a bit of old Ireland," and rose to his feet with a suave but resolute " Sir."

Amidst murmurs of displeasure, Dr. Bland sailed leisurely forth upon a stream of sweetly rippling sentences. He escorted his hearers back to the very beginnings of the hospital, recounted airily how much of its success was owing to his own exertions and those of his lamented colleague, Dr. Sumner, and reminded them that, until the introduction of the new nurses, all had worked together on behalf of the suffering poor in the most unbroken harmony. The audience shuffled impatient feet and murmurs of " Divide " were heard. Dr. Bland still talked suavely on, dropping smiles around him, and balancing his golden *pince-nez* to emphasise the buoyant rhythm of his periods. It began to dawn upon his hearers that he was speaking against time, and the movements of impatience gathered force. They were reaching a climax, which, in spite of the mild expostulations of the chairman, threatened to drown the speaker's voice, when the door was flung open and Sumner came in, with Trevor close behind him. Outside a momentary view was caught of a little gentleman waving triumphant cuffs. A sudden hush fell upon the

meeting as the new-comers looked inquiringly about them. Dr. Bland, still smiling, brought his speech leisurely to anchor and Sumner sprang to his feet.

Trevor found himself next to Ida. "How is it you have begun so soon?" he asked in a whisper; "we were summoned for 4.30."

Ida assured him that though she and Dr. Bland had only arrived a few minutes after four o'clock, they had found the meeting already in full swing.

Then Trevor dived into one pocket after another, and at length drew forth a card which bore out his assertion; but the moment she saw it Ida pointed out in triumph that the "30" was a pen-and-ink emendation.

"A trick," she whispered. "My cousin must know."

Trevor puckered his brows and pulled at his moustache, then seized a pen, wrote hurriedly on the card, and handed it to his friend.

Sumner meanwhile was fighting an uphill battle. As a rule he spoke with the quiet emphasis of one fully and firmly convinced of his cause. The moral effect of his speeches was mainly derived from a good-humoured confidence which seemed to take it for granted that no sensible person would be likely to differ from him. But now the haste in which he was compelled to rise, and later his disgust at the stratagem that had been played upon him, reinforced his words with a passionate vigour not usual to them. He at once took the highest

ground. They were not acting (he told his hearers) in a mere domestic drama, where due play might be allowed to private prepossessions and affections; but as public servants, of whom wisdom and impartial justice would be demanded. Their actions would be jealously scrutinised, and an unwise decision might imperil the whole scheme of hospital benevolence, which, he would remind them, was still on trial. The State—and he raised a warning finger—might yet take from them the privilege of caring for the poor, and exact as a tax the subscriptions they now gave as a freewill offering. Let them calmly weigh the facts. The Committee, their duly elected representatives, had found themselves compelled, after prolonged deliberation and on due consideration of evidence, which could not be laid with advantage before a crowded meeting, to take a purely administrative step. The question was, Who was to be supreme in the hospital—the responsible representatives of the subscribers, or the Sister Superior, who was responsible to no one? If the decisions of the Committee were to be constantly appealed against by their own servants, there was an end of all authority. No undertaking could be successfully worked on such terms. “What would be your judgment of me, sir,” he said for peroration, facing the veteran in the chair, “if I, a subaltern, say, in the regiment with whose glories your name is so inseparably connected, had disobeyed

orders, had been fairly tried, had been reinstated in my rank on pledge of future good conduct, and then had gone to Parliament and the press to have my pledges cancelled and your authority set at naught? We are not a regiment here, you may say. True, but I have yet to be taught that disciplined unity of action is less needful amongst those whose mission it is to save life, than amongst those whose solemn duty it is to destroy it."

Sumner's speech was received with mingled murmurs of approbation and dissent. Irene, looking up, caught a glimpse of Ida bending bright, delighted eyes on the speaker, and then addressing an elated whisper to Trevor. She made a sign to her nephew to come to her, but he gravely shook his head, and with a word to Ida passed out of the room.

Sumner meanwhile was earnestly talking to the General, and soon Ida heard him say—

"I have the chairman's leave to show you this card, and solicit a close scrutiny of it. For one thing it explains the apparent discourtesy of my own unpunctuality, but besides that it lets in a vivid light upon the mole-like workings of one party in this unhappy controversy. Personally, of course, I am flattered that so much importance should be attached to my own power of influencing opinion. But it leaves me resolved, with your aid, to stamp out this conspiracy against your authority."

Then the division was taken, and the Committee were the winners by a single vote. The loss of Trevor's support, of which his aunt had counted herself secure, lost her the victory ; for the casting vote of the chairman, in spite of Sumner's appeal, would certainly have been thrown in her favour.

Trevor went to Sister Irene's room and waited for her. Presently she came in, wearing that suppressed look which, for those who knew her, indicated hidden fires.

"I am disappointed in you," she said, standing stiffly at a distance from him. "You have not the courage of your opinions."

"How could I vote for a tainted cause?" he asked.

"Oh, you were taken in by that fine piece of stage play. I have warned you of John Sumner before. He is not straightforward."

"It is not his straightforwardness that is in question. I don't accuse you, aunt. Such a paltry trick! Believe me, it never entered my head. But surely you ought to have disclaimed it."

"You attach far too much importance to it."

"I don't think I do. The whole affair was a plot, on the face of it: the short speeches, the impatience, the hurry to divide. You would have profited by it if successful. Unsuccessful, you ought to have denounced it.

"Your arguments are wiredrawn, Ambrose. Nor is your temper respectful. We will have no further discussion. Go now, pray. I am busy."

Trevor left the room, and Irene sank into a chair, pressing her lips together and clasping her hands angrily round her knees.

As a matter of fact Irene was more guilty than she was ready to admit to her nephew. The "card-trick," as Sumner afterwards laughingly described it, had been the work of one of her most attached subordinates, who, finding the notices laid out in the Secretary's office, had overjoyed a harassed clerk by offering to help in addressing them. She had subsequently confessed the villany of her pen to her Superior, but Irene, while duly admonishing her too zealous friend, had made no effort to repair the fraud, and, in fact, had been not unwilling to profit by it. She was now enraged against herself, and still more so against her nephew, who for the first time in his life had left her with his respect for her diminished.

CHAPTER XII

THE COMPACT

"HERO of the day!" said Ida, beaming on John Sumner as they drove home in Dr. Bland's carriage. They had dropped the doctor at his club and were on their way to take up his wife.

"A ridiculous entertainment, wasn't it?" said Sumner; "I felt I had no grip of them."

"Quite enough to pull your cause out of the fire," observed Ida.

"I ought to have had a swinging majority. But it's hopeless talking to an audience of that sort. Your benevolent person thinks he has bought a title to prejudices. It is talking to a down cushion, addressing a meeting half made up of maiden ladies smelling of lavender and sanctimony, small popes from suburban vicarages, and superannuated colonels, who fancy that a wild youth in London and a couple of skirmishes against naked niggers give them a claim to drill the world. I could have swung a dozen common jurymen round to my view in three sentences."

"It must be grand to know you can mould people like that," said Ida with enthusiasm.

"The best thing on this world's counter."

"And the hardest, I suppose. Yet I don't quite see why, except that people are so unreasonable."

Sumner laughed. "It's always the easy-looking that means hard doing," he said. "Violin-playing, now, would be as easy as it looks if the bow and strings would be more reasonable. The fact is, most people are manageable, if you only try hard enough. The difficulty is not in one's audience, but in one's self. For ten people swayed by argument, there are a hundred swayed by character. The faith that moves mountains is faith in one's self."

Sumner's unorthodox assertion startled the Arch-deacon's daughter less than one might have imagined; its substance, if not its form, chimed in with her own feeling, for she had a full share in the overbearing self-confidence, the *ὕβρις*, common in clever young people of both sexes whose position at the intellectual top of their own social heap has left their corners jagged.

"Most men," Sumner went on, "fall a prey to the 'worth-while' tempter before they put forth their best effort, and then it's all over with them. My belief is that any one will do as you like if you only press him hard enough."

"But suppose he does not like?" asked Ida, fingering her parasol tassel.

"Or she?" said Sumner, watching her.

"Or she," Ida slowly repeated.

"Then it becomes a duel of wills. The better wins."

"A pleasant theory for weaker vessels."

"Pleasant enough. For the stronger makes the weaker vibrate to his own desire."

"So I suppose the bird enjoys hovering into the serpent's jaws?"

"One doesn't eat one's fellow-creatures," Sumner retorted; "one can assimilate them, as the doctors say, without that."

When Mrs. Bland joined them, Sumner still kept his seat opposite to Ida, and they were driven to the Park. It was a warm afternoon at the end of May, and the drive was full.

"I did not count on this solemnity, mother," said Sumner. "Come, Ida, and walk with me."

"Humour him, my dear," whispered Mrs. Bland. "He never could sit still."

Ida was conscious of a momentary "jib" at the idea of "humouring" her cousin, but she was as anxious as he to be out of the crowd of carriages, and she gracefully yielded to his request. As they walked together beneath the fresh green of the trees, Sumner noted with complacency the approving eyes that met and

followed his companion. They stood a moment at the rail to watch the sleek equipages and the beauties on show, and he asked in her ear—

“Wouldn’t you like to step up and take your place amongst them, Ida?”

“Yes, I could endure it.”

“And all it implies?”

She looked up at him quickly. “All it implies?” she repeated. “Assimilation by one of you wilful monsters? Do carriages and diamonds imply that?”

“Not of necessity. Perhaps you will be the assimilator. But there must be assimilation somewhere if you are to have happiness with your high-steppers. Seriously,” he went on, though not without a touch of banter in his tone, “are you above the common longing for a safe position, money, luxury, power, the awed looks of those beneath you, the envy of your equals? You will have them all some day, Ida.”

“So Mr. Trevor prophesied.”

“Trevor! What does he know about it? But of course every one knows. In this world beauty at least gets its deserts.”

“When it pays the price,” murmured Ida.

This talk set Sumner thinking. Prophesying was easy, he said to himself, if the prophet could make good his own forecast, and then for the first time it flashed across his mind that Trevor himself might wish to be

a prophet of that sort, and a quick pang of jealous apprehension shot through him. Curiously, he had never before thought of Trevor as a serious rival. He had looked on his open admiration of Ida as one of his thousand enthusiasms, as a single scene in a constantly unwinding *Schwärmerei*. He had capped the painter's encomiums on her noble spirit with praises of her beauty and brisk sense, and had ended the contest a dozen times by clasping Trevor's arm and assuring him of his determination to make Miss Bannatyne his wife. So far Trevor's secret had been safe from his friend, who, when he had a goal before him, so filled his retina with its image that it had no room to take in his competitors. Even now he quickly dismissed from his mind the suspicion that Ida's words had aroused.

"What do you think of Trevor?" he asked her abruptly.

"I think he is exactly the opposite of you," she replied, after a moment's reflection; "a little too charming to be real—like the hero of a woman's novel."

"Then I suppose I must be too real to be charming," laughed Sumner.

"A man cannot be too real," said Ida, looking back at him as she stepped into the carriage.

Sumner said good-bye and strode off with his usual slow, resolute swing to the Chelsea studio, where he heard that his friend was expected back every minute.

He went in and sat down, pleasantly weary from the afternoon's excitement. The place was as familiar to him in every feature as his own sunny rooms in Piccadilly. The unfinished Aphrodite faced him, and for a time he encountered the wistful, love-hungry eyes with a lazy, stolid gaze.

"Bah! these painters," he muttered at length. "What artifice-mongers they are! My Ida a gushing school-girl! Actress!"

Then in the growing dusk his eyes wandered round the room till a new picture, hanging over the writing-table, cried them "Halt." He strode across to it, and could just make out that it was an old engraving of Moretto's celebrated picture "Saint Justina." He lighted a candle to examine it more closely, and after a brief survey shrugged his shoulders and returned to his easy-chair. The very thing in the picture—its unsubstantial, mystic quality—which made it precious to Trevor, irritated his friend. He could not appreciate the solemn beauty and deep religious feeling, which make it a very colour sonnet. It is a picture to live with. The saint—a grand woman, beautiful in her stately repose—stands under acacia boughs in a warm Italian landscape. At her side there kneels a full-bearded man, who gazes up at her with yearning adoration. Her eyes meet his with grave questioning, as if she were in doubt of the whole-heartedness of his homage.

Sumner sat musing for another ten minutes, and then suddenly resolved to leave a note for Trevor and make his way homeward. He opened the artist's blotting-book, searching for a blank sheet amongst the stray papers with which it was stuffed, and his eye fell on a pen-and-ink copy of the engraving overhead. Trevor in desultory moods had a musing, half-unconscious habit of expressing himself in pen and ink. Sumner found a score of such stray notes of passing fancies before him; he shuffled them back with a grunt and took up again the first that had met his eye. There was something in it which struck him as having a vague relation to himself. He looked at it intently, and suddenly he found the saint assuming the look of Miss Ida Bannatyne. The likeness was indefinite enough to escape a passing glance, but once recognised, was impossible to ignore. Across the corner of the sketch some hurried microscopic lines were written. Sumner brought them near his eye and read—"Donna leggiadra, Bene è colui d'ogni valore scarco, Qual tuo spirto gentil non innamora."

His lips curled at the idea of Miss Bannatyne posing for a "spirto gentil," and he hurried the sketch back into the writing-book. Then another thought flashed upon him, and he drew a long breath. He caught hold of the sketch again and held it near the light.

The door opened and Trevor came in.

Sumner rose and put out a hand to his friend, while in the other he still held the sketch.

"Tell me, Ambrose," he said, "have I been a blind ass?"

A flush came over Trevor's face, but his voice failed him.

"You have loved her all along?" Sumner went on.

"John, she is my life," cried Trevor; "I cannot give her up;" and he began walking nervously about the room.

Sumner leant against the table and watched him. From the easel Aphrodite looked on both beseechingly.

Then Trevor suddenly stopped in his walk and asked — "You have not yet spoken?"

"No, not yet."

"Neither have I. The die is yet to cast. Ah, God!"

"Ambrose, you saw and loved her first. You shall speak first. I don't often let men get before me, but this is no common contest."

"No, no. I will not be beholden for her to any one, not even to you. Friends though we are, I cannot ask it."

"Well, then, let neither take the advantage. Let us write each for himself: let her hear both before she need answer."

Trevor still paced up and down the room, his head sunk on his breast and his hands working. Soon he came up to his friend and touched his arm.

"I accept," he said. "It is grand of you, my brother, to offer it. You handicap yourself terribly in giving up the right to speak to her. You can bend people to your will so easily with your words. All I give up is the right to speak first. I dreaded the magic of your speech."

They clasped hands, and Sumner's parting words were: "No delay. The morning postman shall be our messenger."

CHAPTER XIII

THE JUDGMENT

THE next morning Ida, stepping fresh and rosy from her bath into her trim little boudoir, found three letters on her breakfast tray. At Dr. Bland's, breakfast was a casual upstairs meal, the ground-floor being at this hour a patients' territory. Ida loved to dawdle over her tray in the loose luxury of tea-gown and slippers. It was the one innovation on the strict Eastmere *régime* which had her thorough approval. The three letters glistened whitely beside the toast-rack. She took them up deliberately, and turned them over in her hand as if trying to divine their contents. Before she had made up her mind which to open first, Eva Sumner burst in upon her with the day's *Byleaf* in her hand. Ida pocketed her letters.

"More rhapsodies, Eva?" she asked.

"No, something quite out of the common; not in *the* style at all. A new writer, I fancy. He calls it a 'Plea for a silent Breakfast-table.' Listen to this:—

"With most of us the morning mood is one of reflection, a mood so rare and precious, that we should not lightly allow the loquacity of other hours to invade it. Thought is a rare frail bird, which twittering sparrows will peck to death, if silence keep her not in golden ward.

"And here's another bit :—

"And as thought is for the morning so is the morning for thought. Now lies the day spread open before us, the day with its roughnesses and its retreats, its burden of duty and music of hope. Now are resolves to be clinched, paths to be chosen, costs to be reckoned—no chatterer's work. A wise man—perhaps also a wise woman—talks little but thinks much about the future, for so he makes himself best heard by it. With the day in front of him, he steals into the chamber of thought and is still. Ahead are things worth thinking of—nay, that must be thought of. Behind him only dreams, perhaps, whereon even words are wasted. Let him talk when the day is done, for the past is the harvest-field of speech ; but the future is the fallow of reflection.

"That's rather neatly put, isn't it?" said Eva. "Will you have more?"

"A very lesson for the day. No more! It carries conviction," answered Ida drily, pouring out her coffee.

Eva lingered, talking on. Her cousin lost patience. "Away, sparrow!" she cried. Eva laughed, and took herself off.

Then Ida put out her hand for her letters, took the first she touched, and opening it hastily, read as follows :—

"MY DEAR MISS BANNATYNE—I write to you

because I can no longer keep silent. We have not known each other long, but in that time you have grown to me dearer than the dearest of friends. You have become, you are, the woman whom I worship and love beyond every visible thing. A hundred times my lips have striven, but failed to tell you this. It has seemed to me almost a mad hope that you should deign to accept my love.

“Believe me, dear Miss Bannatyne, if ever woman had a true and loyal lover, you have it in me. If you have such regard for me as will let me clothe you with my love, you will make me happy far above all other men, and far above my own deserts for ever. There shall then be no moment of my days that shall not be vowed to your service, no thought in which you shall not be. Your life shall be calm, happy, beautiful, luxurious, as far as I have the art to make it so ; and if I have not the art, love, who can do all things, will be ever with me in my heart to teach it.—Yours, with devout affection,

“AMBROSE TREVOR.”

Ida read the letter through at a glance, perused it again slowly and more critically, pausing at each sentence, then folded it and returned it to its cover, and leant back in her chair musing.

Soon she roused herself and took up the second letter. It was written in a firm, bold hand, and ran thus :—

“DEAR IDA—You will not, I think, be surprised to receive from me an explicit statement of that which my words and conduct towards you, ever since I returned to England, have been hourly meant to convey—my admiration, esteem, and love for you. Your beauty, your character, and your gifts of intellect are such that no one can be insensible to them, and it would have needed no deliberation on my part to place my happiness with confidence in your hands. I have deliberated, however, long and carefully whether the position and advantages which I can offer you, should I be honoured with your acceptance of my suit, are such as to afford you the prospect of a happy life and due scope for your abilities.

“We are not children any longer, dear Ida, and before making any such momentous change in our lives as that which I propose, it behoves us to weigh it calmly. I believe we are thoroughly suited to each other. Your love, and a continuance of the privilege of loving you, are all that I need to make my life most perfectly happy and complete. And though everything that I can offer you—except my love, with regard to which I will admit of no qualifications—must be far below your deserts, with you to work for and your voice to animate, I know I can rise to heights otherwise beyond me.

“If you care for power, influence, consideration, I think there is fair promise that together we may achieve them.

But in any case, in accepting my proposals, if you do accept them, you may ever count on my most devoted service.—Yours, if you will, till death,

“JOHN SUMNER.”

Ida folded up this letter after a single reading, muttering “The Ogre,” and took up the third.

“Poor Eric!” she said to herself, eyeing the envelope, “your writing improves as little as your prospects; both hopelessly past mending.”

Captain Armstrong’s handwriting was certainly in a low stage of development,—a handwriting of tentative, irresolute effort. Unformed, and undistinguishable from the pencraft of hundreds of his brother-officers, it had never undergone that differentiative development which is the characteristic of higher forms.

“DEAREST IDA”—his letter ran—“I wanted to tell you last night, but you would not let me, that I have sounded my father through a friend to find out what he would do for me if I will turn prodigal son and settle down. I hear that if I marry he will pay my debts, and allow me £600 a year, which with my pay would enable one to live in moderate comfort, at any rate for a time. As this is what has always prevented you from looking on any proposal of mine as a serious one, I put it first to get it out of the way; and then perhaps, Ida dear, you will listen while I tell you once more that I love

you so truly and dearly that the idea of going on living any longer without you is simply unbearable. If you will not care for me, I do not care, no, not a sixpence, what becomes of myself.

"I know there are lots of men about you much richer and cleverer than I am, and I am often wild at the thought of it. But, Ida dear, I know there is not one of them that cares a hundredth part as much for your whole sweet self as I care for the tiniest lock of your hair. I am a stupid, good-for-nothing fellow, but there is one thing that I will stand against the whole world for, and that is my love for you. It has lasted for many years now, and, in fact, it seems to me as if it had always been there.

"If you will only say again, as you once did, that you care a little bit for me, and that some day you will let me call you mine, I shall be happier than I can tell, and you shall have the most loving—I repeat it—the most loving husband and slave in the world.—Yours, most faithful and true,

ERIC."

Armstrong, who had been away from town, had called in Savile Row the previous afternoon while Ida was at the hospital, had learnt from Mrs. Bland that they were to be at the play that evening, and had immediately driven off to secure a stall for himself. He sat gloomily through the first piece, wondering at the facile

laughter of pit and gallery, and throwing expectant glances round the house. Suddenly sunshine burst forth upon his face.

A pair of those insatiate playgoers who are as much agog for the byplay in front of the footlights as for the acting behind them, followed his smiles to one of the boxes, where a fair-headed girl in a plain black bodice was freeing her arms from a fur mantle. Beside her sat a placid dowager, with a pink-and-white skin on the verge of wizenness, and behind them gleamed a comfortable expanse of white waistcoat and shirt-front leading up to a genial fatherly countenance.

"Know how to frame their daughter, eh?" whispered the first playgoer. "There is no setting for a blonde like a theatre box."

"That's true," replied his better-informed friend, "except that it's their niece. He is Dr. Bland, great for nerves and twitchings. Does a thriving business amongst young *roués*."

"One wouldn't think he had had much experience himself that way. Fresh as a daisy he looks."

"Oh, there are men who will look fresh on no liver to speak of. Plump up to sixty, and then mummies in a month. That's the way a free life serves some of us: keeps tempting you on and then forecloses without a hint. Trust me, a weak habit's a blessing in the long run. There's no driving to the devil with a tetchy

liver on the box-seat. It's 'Pull up, pull up,' before ever you get into a decent trot."

"Walk or trot, the devil will put you up, if you go his road. And so that's his niece?"

"Don't you catch the likeness? Fresh as a flower—a flower fit for any man's table."

"Ah, a girl like that may marry where she pleases. I daresay now that's a young lord in the stalls."

"Not a bit of it," observed the better-informed. "Merely an ordinary army man. A Captain Armytage, I think,—one of the Wiltshire Armytages."

Ida nodded and smiled with genuine pleasure at the sight of Armstrong, and as the curtain fell he was knocking at her box door. The moment before, Dr. Bland had warned her that he was a hopeless profligate, a reckless squanderer, who, baronet or no baronet, would end his days in poverty. He knew the history of the family well; the time had come round for a spendthrift, and there he was, a man whom no sensible girl would waste a thought on. "Most young vices are curable," said Dr. Bland, "a spendthrift's never. It's inborn—a congenital want of proper thatching. I would as soon see a girl of mine marry an idiot outright as one of these guinea-sprinklers."

Ida received her friend with a grave smile and glided into amicable chat, but up to the moment when she made good her retreat into the roomy bastion of Dr.

Bland's carriage, Eric was allowed no single opportunity of speaking to her alone. So he went home gloomily to strain out his heart on sheets of notepaper, until a letter got composed which to his tired senses seemed worthy of the occasion.

The first thing that Ida did after reading her letters was to get up and turn the key in her door. Then she threw herself into a chair and closed her eyes. Minutes glided by before she could take in the whole situation. She has been depicted as a young woman with a singularly intimate familiarity with her own mind, and as a rule her decisions came before the world as almost too sharply cut for one of her age and upbringing. But now the demand on her was overwhelming, and for the first time in her life she found herself wishing for a share of that maturer judgment, the achievements of which she had heretofore regarded as immensely overrated by its possessors. Then some words of Trevor's darted out of her memory. "Age and experience!" he had burst forth one day, when they were discussing the conduct of life, "what can they give us, but creaking substitutes for a lost instinct? A young heart, a young conscience, are less erring pathfinders than your worldly syllogisms, and age and experience are self-condemned when they claim, as they do, from youth a swiftness and finality of decision which they never expect from themselves."

The sentiment had fitted into her own philosophy of life more accurately than Trevor's sentiments often did, and she now sought comfort from it. But she sadly shook her head. Heart! instinct! their dull glimmer only perplexed her the more. For a moment she longed for their guidance, would have rejoiced to be able to give herself up to their mastery, to throw calculation to the winds, and act the part of a lovesick girl. If she could but have loved herself out of her dilemma! The weak moment passed, the civilised vanquished the barbaric, and she mentally shook herself, to get rid of the romantic idea and prepare to grapple with her difficulties, as a prudent latter-day young woman would be expected to do.

Armstrong's offer she at once set aside with an "Ah, if he had an income!" She was not scared by her uncle's warning, for she had confidence enough in herself to know that with Eric's ring on her finger there would be an end of his squanderings. But the prospect of poverty appalled her. "A summer of pinching," she said to herself, "and an autumn of titled boredom. No, Eric, you may become the most loving husband in the world, but not mine."

Next she took up Sumner's letter. His proposals had much fascination for her. She had complete confidence in his power, and knew that it was in him to achieve greatness. His fine physique and presence,

his full, pliant, dominating voice, his humorous self-assurance and robust sense, were the qualities to prevail in the new democracy. Whatever prizes and honours politics offered, he might count upon. She had a vision of him scaling the official ladder, a man of weight and consequence, deferred to by cabinets, cheered by crowded meetings, aweing boisterous young Torydom in the house, kissing the Sovereign's hand. At the idea of John's unmanageable limbs tamed into knee-breeches she gave a just audible laugh, which subsided into a smile as she pictured herself the wife of the Right Honourable member, holding her own with great Whig ladies, head of a salon, with a court of young Gamaliels around her footstool. A taking prospect, if John could only be counted on to take the right path, or to be guided into it by a wife's prevailing influence. But he was not a man to be counted on. He would choose his own orbit, and follow it doggedly, dragging his wife a helpless satellite in his wake. His ideals and his temptations were not the common ones. He sneered at political rank and secluded fountains of honour, poured scorn on what he called our English Grand Llamaism, and volleyed sarcasms at the craving of our "upper middle" for a perfumed life. Stars and coronets, draperies and diamonds, were for him the degrading trappings of lackeys grown fat and insolent on unearned wages, parasites gorging themselves into conscienceless impotence on the

country's juices. For all Ida knew Sumner might fly off at any moment into the backwoods to live on his own hand-labour, or dart at the throat of privilege in the forefront of a red-capped rabble. Clearly a man of such unforeseeable future was no husband for a girl who felt that her place was amongst the rulers, and whose absorbing ambition was to play a coruscating part amongst old armour and tapestries and family portraits. Yet for a moment Ida hesitated in doubt of her intuition, and of her own assumed impotence, before she put Sumner's offer aside and faced that of his friend Trevor.

A life of luxurious ease, filled with music and beauty and fragrant flattery, free from struggle and jar, safeguarded from the nip of poverty and all sordid preoccupations—that was the bright prospect pictured in Trevor's letter, a prospect threatened only by the one small cloud of his dependence on his aunt, which would surely melt away at a word from her guardian-uncle. "An artist's wife." The words had not the bourgeois ring for her that they had at Eastmere, before she had seen society paying homage to our modern Titians and Velasquezes. A deft paint-brush now meant wealth, rank, and a footing among the best. Trevor's brush had latent power in it, which would call down fame upon him when he left off painting simply for his own pleasure and by his own standard. Under the breath of ambition and the

smiles of a winning wife, he would pass from his present laborious idealism to a facile common-sense art, as surely as another painter had stepped from the green crudities of an Ophelia to the paying pleasingness of a Portia. Trevor was ductile, Ida thought; his whims sat lightly upon him. She had no doubt as to the reality of her influence over him. But for a moment, strange as it may seem, she had misgivings as to her worthiness. She realised for a fleeting instant the purity and beauty of his chivalrous ideals, and felt them out of harmony with her ambitions for him and for herself. He misread her, saw in her perfections she did not own. Ida did not argue down her misgivings. They passed, and soon she sat down to pen the words that should bring an accepted lover to her side.

CHAPTER XIV

AMIDST THE GOLDEN CLOUDS

WHILE Miss Bannatyne was making deliberate disposal of her hand, the lover of her choice lay stretched on his back asleep in a blazing sun amongst the ferns and gorse of a Kentish common. When, after his compact with Sumner, he went out to put his fate to the touch through the slit of a red pillar-box there was already a flush of morning in the east. Coming home he threw himself down to sleep, but his head was full of whirling snatches of thought. In the brain that is attuned to sleep the thoughts are soberly given, quiet, retiring; modestly they make way while the one of your choice treads a slow measure with you up to the gates of oblivion. But in the sleepless brain the thoughts are as dancing Mænads, jostling each other madly but in vain for mastery: their feet are not to be schooled to the sedate approach that alone wins the guardians of sleep's temple. To Trevor, as he turned upon his pillow, his head seemed filled with the leaping torches and tossed limbs of a

wild orgy, all keeping time to the pulse that hotly thrummed in his ear the name of Ida. For a time that seemed hours he forced himself to endure it, but the dance grew wilder and the longed-for gates more distant. Soon he rose, bathed his head and tried to paint, but his hands were hot and shaking. He sought calm in one occupation after another, but all in vain. At last he seized a soft hat, crammed some biscuits into his pocket, and left the house.

He crossed the river, and made rapidly for the nearest high ground, where he halted for a moment to draw in a deep breath, and look across to the Hampstead hills looming through the blue haze. Then swiftly he walked by Tooting and Streatham till he was on the brow of Beulah Hill. Here he paused again. His eyes roamed freely over the rolling stretch of country before him from Knockholt beeches to the dim hills near Weybridge. He drew in peace from its broad tranquillity, as it reposed in the morning sun, which here picked out the steam of a creeping train and there a white house backed by elms. His thoughts began to sober and he breathed more freely. He rested by the wayside to eat his biscuits and smoke a cigarette, and then plunged downhill again past long lines of yellow villas, whence city clerks were hurrying to their morning train, munching their last mouthful of breakfast. Soon he was amongst real fields and trees, breathing the pure breath of nature.

His mind at last was calm, and he strode leisurely along the damp lanes. Now he could stand and listen to the thrush's morning song, and watch the wayside flowers, the old dear friends on whose portraits he had lavished such pains in boyish days. He loved them all, had by heart the curve of each stem, the shading of each leaf, the tint of each petal. The sight of them recalled to him, as it always did, the careless holiday hours that he had spent before them trying to read their secrets. He stood awhile looking at them, leaning on his stick, and passed on murmuring, "For ye are also His offspring."

He left behind him the gray turrets of Wickham House, and threading a steep lane overhung by beech and hazel, soon stepped out on Hayes Common. He knew the place well; he had often gone on pilgrimage there in times of mental unrest, and never without breathing in peace from the view of its wide horizon. An occasional bird's-eye view is a necessary corrective to town life; it stretches the eyes, restores one's sense of proportion, drops one a peg or two nearer one's proper place in creation, reveals the insignificance and at the same time the reality of one's part in the long drama of the universe.

Trevor, looking northward across the airy ocean to where a huge black buoy of cloud was tethered to the sunken rocks and wreckage of the great city, could scarcely realise that there, possibly at that very hour,

the course of his future life was being marked out for him. He could almost have imagined that it was for some indifferent third person that woe or rapture was being drawn, so much was his sense of individuality lulled by weariness and want of sleep and the drowsy fumes of infinite emotion. He thought of Ida as a dear friend whom he would fain have by to share in the rich feast before him.

Soon he threw himself down amidst the gorse upon the short fine grass that tells of rabbits' husbandry, and looked up into the blue, thinking still of Ida. The air was full of soft harmonies, through which a lark overhead sent down a glittering shaft of song. Scraps of verse came back to him, and he repeated them under his breath, dwelling on their fragrance. He drew his cap over his eyes to shade them from the sun, and soon, wearied out, his eyelids closed and he sank to sleep murmuring, "Auch ich war in Arkadien geboren."

"There is perhaps no solitary sensation so exquisite," says Leigh Hunt, "as that of slumbering on the grass or hay, shaded from the hot sun by a tree, with the consciousness of a fresh but light air running through the wide atmosphere, and the sky stretching far overhead on all sides. Earth and heaven and a placid humanity seem to have the creation to themselves. There is nothing between the slumberer and the naked and glad innocence of nature." Naught came to break Trevor's

enjoyment of the "exquisite sensation." The hours glided by, the sun began its downwards step and still he slept, dreamlessly, while the birds twittered in the bushes and the rabbits played around him. At last he woke shuddering, with "Doch Thränen gab der kurze Lenz mir nur" sighing in his ears. For a few moments he lay oppressed by a vague foreboding gloom, but the sight of the sunlight on the fresh green fronds at his feet quickly rethawed his emotions, and content came back to him. He rose and crossed the common to an inn, whence, after modest regalement, he made for the nearest station, and soon found himself sitting in a third-class carriage amongst market-gardeners, whose talk of early peas and endive chimed in well with his idyllic mood.

At home he found Ida's letter awaiting him. It contained only a line of thanks, and a request to him to call on her at five o'clock that afternoon. He had barely time to rid himself of the stains of travel, and drive to Savile Row. The ache of suspense which, returning with his recruited forces, had finally dispossessed his mind of its large emotions at the sight of the grimy streets, was not wholly allayed by Ida's letter, and he stood on Dr. Bland's doorstep still uncertain as to the reception before him.

He was not left long in doubt. He was shown up at once to Miss Bannatyne's boudoir—Hugh Sumner

brushing by him on the stairs with a curt greeting—and with the clasp of his lady's hand and the frank, friendly welcome of her eyes, his misgivings vanished in a surge of rapture. There was a trace of shyness in her manner, a little loss of her wonted self-possession, which in her lover's eyes gave her a new charm. She spoke calmly and sensibly, without effusiveness or show of passion, and heard his transports with a smile of sedate happiness. Her reception of him was everything that Trevor would have had it. To have license to love her and lay his heart bare to her was what he yearned for. He asked for no bared heart in return, and would have been as much disturbed by an outburst of passion on Ida's part, as a devout Catholic to whom the image of the Virgin should descend with offer of worldly caresses. He sketched for her again in still brighter tints the promises of his letter, and dwelt with joy on the life that she was opening to him and to herself,—the pure, happy life that was to be given to pursuing and revealing truth under the guidance of her two handmaidens, beauty and love. Ida was borne down by the rush of her lover's words. Her throat swelled at the thrill in his voice, and she had to brush away, almost angrily, a tear that had the effrontery to steal from its retreat.

“Will you love me always, whatever I become?” she asked with an unwonted shyness.

“My God, into eternity.”

The greatness of his passion, the thought of the prize all thrown at her feet, overcame her, and for the moment she felt her return for it woefully inadequate.

"What can I do?" she faltered.

"Do?" cried Trevor. "Be!" and he clasped her hands and pressed his lips reverently upon her forehead.

Soon afterwards he left her. He was in amongst the trees in Hyde Park before he realised his whereabouts. Even then he seemed to be walking in a golden haze. Everything was magical around him. The earth was as a cushion to his feet, the horses and carriages and people moved before him like spectres. The air was filled with soft choruses, and the trees and flowers seemed to beckon their felicitations. Within him his pulses throbbed joyfully and every breath was a draught of pleasure. He went down to the water across which the westering sun threw a broad path of light, and the wavelets came up to his feet dancing to the music that rang in his brain. Oh, Love, thou enchantress that canst make a Paradise even of a London garden!

He left the Park and walked slowly homeward, looking into the shop-windows in quest of some offering for his beloved. Everything that met his eyes seemed mean and unworthy of her, until he came to a flower-shop. The young ladies in charge, scenting an unusual occasion, pressed him to let them compose for him a symphony of hothouse flowers, but he gently repulsed

their offer, and chose a basket of fresh-cut roses as the only fitting envoy of his happiness. The thought of their perishableness sent him to the jewellers' shops. There he could find nothing on a level with his fastidiousness, and he ended by deciding to send to Ida a quaint antique ring, from among the dear treasures that had come to him from his mother.

He reached home counting on a long silent evening of delicious reverie, but on his table lay a telegram from Stanley Hood, summoning him to the office of the *Byleaf*. He sought out and despatched the ring and flung himself angrily into a cab ; before he had been in it five minutes, however, he was glad of the call upon him ; and found his pen-hand itching to leave a worthy record of the day's emotions.

Hood was impatiently stamping up and down the little den when he arrived.

"Oh, you have come at last," the little man burst out. "Here's a sweet business. No *Byleaf* to-morrow ! I hear already the gibes of a thousand breakfast-tables. We shall look pretty fools."

"'Twill make no difference to our friends," said Trevor lightly.

"It is all very well for you. I can't afford to be associated with a failure."

"And to our enemies," Trevor went on, "we must throw a sop now and then."

"One would not mind if there were any compensation. But the *Byleaf* brings nothing but kicks. I am resolved to throw the whole thing up."

Trevor smiled at the threat, which by constant use had lost whatever edge it once possessed. He knew that Hood would think many times before giving up his cheaply-earned pose of distinguished writer. As Sumner had once said in allusion to him, "Borrowed feathers are slowly moulted." Trevor would gladly have seen the threat fulfilled, but he was not the man to make an ungenerous use of a friend's tempers. He had not the diplomatist's art of turning assailants' weapons against themselves. He ignored Hood's anger, and calmly inquired for the cause of it. His friend burst out into tirades against dilettante writers who dawdled over their proofs, and drunken engravers who would not work at Whitsuntide, and ended by cramming into Trevor's hands a bundle of rejected communications, saying, "Find your Hobson's choice there."

Trevor soon coaxed his friend out of the way and seated himself at the desk. He stayed at the office-writing and proof-correcting until midnight had struck, and this is what the *Byleaf* published a few hours later :—

A FAIRY IDYLL.

One year in an Umbrian meadow a crocus blossomed late. Hastily its golden doors unfolded to the morning sun and forth there leaped a tiny sprite, whose crimson wings proclaimed him

one of the ministry of Love. Now Mab had long passed northward with her train, and there was no one by to welcome and instruct the trembling elf. So he sat silent upon the grass, awaiting his task. The sun beamed on him and the spring passed into his veins, and now he would fain pour forth his happy soul in song. Painfully his throat throbbed and fluttered, but no sound came. He knew not yet that the fairies' only song is that which they hale from mortal throats. Just then a lark burst forth in rapture overhead, and forthwith the fairy knew the song for his, and this truth burst upon him, that it is a happier thing to inspire the songs of others than to make music one's self.

With this all his instinct awoke, and he flew forth merrily to his labours. First he went to call the bees and lead them to the flowers ; but they had long been up, had learnt the flowers that loved them, and had no need of him. So he passed on his way.

Some leaves rustled to him, "Bring us the breeze, we stifle here," and he called the breeze so lustily that it came up in haste, and dashed the leaves, who thereon hissed at him an angry rebuke. So he passed on sorrowing.

At length he spied a little bird perched stiffly on a withered twig, and from its throat there seemed to flow a carol of love. The fairy sent forth his soul to breathe more passion into the song ; but the mock carol faltered and ceased. Then forth he went and found a mate shyly hovering near. "Go to her, go !" he cried, and poured his passion into its doubting heart. The bird flew down with eager wing, settled, gave a cry of anguish, and lo, around it was the fowler's net. The fairy shuddered and fled.

Then as he lay disconsolate among the flowers a voice of silvery sweetness came to him : "Enough of trial ; thou shalt fail no more." Upon that the elf rose gaily on his wings and all day long was busy in love's employ.

At last, when the sun was stretching its parting blessing over the meadows, he came to where a maiden sat beside a river

weeping. Her face was hidden by her dimpled hands, through which the salt tears trickled and fell. Around her stood her cows gravely watching her. The fairy joined hands with one of the maiden's thoughts, and together they passed downstream till they came upon a fisher lad who sat moodily mending his lines. The elf put forth his will and the boy threw aside his tackle and stepped into his boat. Slowly he rowed at first, keeping pace with his bitter thoughts, but soon the cloud cleared from his face, and his stroke quickened ; till at last he came up to the weeping maiden. At sight of her he leapt on shore, flung himself on his knees before her, clasped and drew away her hands, and looked imploringly into her face. "Forgive me," he whispered. Smiling through tears, she took his head between her hands, and put her lips to his. The sun set and silence fell around them, and the cows stood by with slow grave eyes.

Then the fairy flew away, contented, to find a resting-place amongst the May.

CHAPTER XV

A QUESTION OF SERVICE

"I AM to marry Mr. Trevor," Miss Bannatyne informed Eva with some abruptness on the evening of her engagement.

Her friend looked up quickly, blinking at her through her glasses, and responded with a long-drawn "Oh!"

"What means that feminine whistle, Eva?" asked Miss Bannatyne. "Am I throwing myself away?"

"You know what I think. Oh, Ida, have you weighed it well? To watch and tend a genius like his!"

"I have not engaged myself as his nurse," said Miss Bannatyne.

"Night and day to be all eye and ear for him," Eva went on; "to answer every thought and wish of his like a well-tuned string; to fan his aspirations and be his stay against temptation; to mould one's self upon him; to stand forth and to efface one's self in turn; to soothe, to cheer, to stimulate; to ward off the frets and jars of life; to hedge him against the frost or fury of the world——"

"I am not to be frightened out of it," Ida broke in.

"Heaven forbid! I want to strengthen you. Your beauty——"

"A court lady chiding the beggar maid."

"Oh, Ida, do be serious. Drop your flippancy at least for this one solemn day. Forgive me, Ida dear. You love him, don't you, fondly?"

"My good child, I am old enough to take care of myself. Whether old enough to be a grandmother to Ambrose, I cannot say. I hope he will be satisfied with me. Thank Heaven, I am no dreamer. I shall be footing solid earth while he is in the clouds. A more practical partnership that, I take it, than if we both were damply perched aloft. Be consoled, Eva, her Flippancy will do her best."

Miss Bannatyne was not unmoved by Eva's exhortations. For long she sat in front of the empty fireplace musing with knitted brows, her chin cradled upon her hand, while the clock on the mantelpiece ticked a stolidly defiant accompaniment to her thoughts.

"Eva is right," she said to herself. "I am worldly to the backbone. Your legacy, dear selfish father. And with what unction you preached altruism! Useless! We are born black sheep and white. · How can preaching persuade a self-seeker to renounce, except by offering it as a higher happiness, making an egoist-altruist of him? If I give up my life to a husband, as Eva bids,

I grasp the finer happiness and leave him the coarser. But he is an artist—a teacher. So the teacher is to be cloistered from trouble and barred from self-denial that he may teach others the better how to face them? That way lie prince-bishoprics and comfortable archdeaconries. If self-denial is bad for the teacher, why good for the taught? so there's an end of it," and Ida threw up her head with a laugh at the blind alley into which her wandering thoughts had brought her.

There came a knocking at the door, and a maid brought in some belated parcels. Ida seized on the diversion with joy, and soon found herself gazing delightedly on Trevor's first presents. Before her lay beauty compressed, refined to its costliest essence, in a ring whereon the brilliants gleamed and flickered; and beauty bashfully unfolding a thousand perfumed, airy wings in a noble bevy of roses. Ida sat down again with the ring on her finger, and the flowers beside her, while a tenderer look played about her eyes and around her lips.

"‘To be’ is all he asks of me," she thought; "to submit myself to love. Can that satisfy? Is there no mean between sultana and squaw? Can there be no interchange of service? There shall be; we will work together. He has force, genius, religion in to-day's sense. He is spiritual to my mere *spirituelle*. But he lacks balance. I could be pendulum to his spring,

checking explosion and carrying him over gulfs of lethargy and despair. Together we might achieve what neither would reach alone. The world should hear of us. Us? Nay, his would be all the credit. What! am I out of love with self-sacrifice already? Oh, Ambrose, I will try to serve you. Let me help you, and together we will step upwards. The crown shall be yours."

With this resolve still palpitating in her she sat down to write her thanks to her lover for his gifts. "They must be the last for a long time, please," she added; "I will not be spoilt. Make of me your helpmeet, not an idol to be propitiated with offerings. You shall teach me how to be of use to you. 'Together'—remember that word."

Trevor made no allusion to the letter when they met, but some days later Ida received from him a gold spray whereon the word he was to remember was written in brilliants. She easily forgave his disobedience to her first request.

That night on her knees, with head bowed down and palms pressed together, Eva Sumner came to a grave resolve. She would join the sisterhood of St. Paul, and strive, in urgent toil for others, to forget her broken hopes. At home she was useless. Her mother had no need of her; and those researches in her attic study which she had once flattered herself would add a cell

or two to the growing organism of knowledge, what were they, even if uninterrupted by the calls of social life, but the ill-aimed, fruitless struggles of a *dilettante*. So in the morning she tenderly put by her microscopes and section-cutters, and a few days later commenced her period of probation under Sister Irene.

The Nursing Society of St. Paul was a pure autocracy. Every member of it—sister, probationer, nurse—bowed without question to the *sic jubeo* of Sister Irene. It was a garden diligently weeded of untrainable plants. The independent in judgment and the tardy in rendering obedience were speedily informed with more decision than delicacy that the Society had no further need of their services. The nurses might bicker and intrigue amongst themselves—and they made fair use of the licence—but so long as each gave prompt obedience to the Superior, such minor episodes were pardoned or overlooked.

Irene was not difficult to obey. Her subjects were willing slaves. They became loyal to enthusiasm the moment they saw her own intense devotedness to her work and to their common cause, and realised that while she often refused to share in the small luxuries and modest dissipations of their austere life, she never imposed a task which she would not willingly undertake herself, if the need arose. New-comers were told how one awful night when the streets were waist-deep in

snowdrift and all traffic was stopped, a summons for a nurse in a case of life and death had come from Hampstead: the nurses, one after another, had demurred at obeying the call, whereupon Sister Irene had quietly gone for her cloak, and would have walked herself through the four miles of snow in the teeth of a north-east gale, had not one of them been shamed into relieving her of the task.

But while cheerfully facing toil and privation herself, and careless of ease and luxury, Irene could make allowance for softer natures. She knew all her subordinates by heart, and unerringly apportioned her burdens where they were best borne and her rewards where they were most needed. So she secured willing service, which she met with a devoted, helpful friendship in health, a soft, untiring care in sickness, and a ready sympathy in sorrow, to a degree rare even in the comradeship of women.

Every novice who joined the Society was placed for her first month in immediate attendance on the Superior, to undergo a process of microscopic observation, until Irene knew every wrinkle and dimple in her character. Eva was excused this prolonged and painful survey. She had been known to Irene from childhood, and only the previous summer had spent a whole month alone with her at the little cottage in Kent, where Irene yearly recruited herself for the winter's work.

"You told me I should come to you," said Eva to Irene on the evening of her arrival at the hospital. She was sitting in a low chair with her hand in the Sister's. "You told me I should come to you sooner or later, and I am come. I could bear the air of home no longer."

"I foresaw it. There was always the spirit of sacrifice in you. But you mistook the altar. Tell me, child, did science satisfy you?"

"For a long time it did. It is inspiring to feel that one is adding truth to truth; that one is working, not to relieve this or that sorrow, which soon is as though it had never been, but to gather and store knowledge which shall give ease and save life in countless cases throughout the ages and throughout the world."

"Ah yes, if one could only be sure of it!" said Irene. "But it is all so problematical, Eva. To-day toils at picking to pieces what yesterday toiled at weaving together. The streets of science are for ever rebuilding. You come to us flourishing new theories, new methods, new drugs, but they die out as quickly as they came in, and you fall back upon the art of your grandfathers. You prevent disease and save life? Yes, and fill our wards with your triumphs, bidding us soothe frail cripples who but for you would be at peace beneath the sod. Grand, isn't it, to think of your mite of knowledge at work in Thibet 3000 A.D. saving cripples? To me science is like a vain youth who carves grand designs

and leaves others to clear up the chips. The designs may turn out well, or they may not, but there is no question as to the necessity of removing the litter. That is our work here. There is at least no contingency about it, Eva."

"Yes, I have felt all that, and it used to undermine my zeal," said Eva. "We women cannot work long and steadily for a remote object.

"There is work close at hand for every woman if she would only see it," replied Irene, "instead of looking afield and repining at her want of opportunities. But our eyes are sealed till sorrow opens them. Women do not come to nurse the sick with a light heart. Even you have had your troubles, Eva."

"I have not been happy, Sister."

"Not since your cousin came to you?"

"We are very fond of each other."

"Sorrow often strikes us through those we love."

The tears came into Eva's eyes and she laid her face in Irene's lap, sobbing. The Sister stroked her head tenderly for a few moments, and then with a change of voice said—

"Come, Eva, courage. Remember the night's work before you. You will have too many tears to soothe away here to find time for any of your own. Now leave me. After prayers I will take you to the children."

Sister Irene had long suspected Eva's secret, and now

she knew it. The discovery deepened her irritation against her nephew, who might have taken this fair saint with her ample dower to wife, and yet had engaged himself to a woman whose heart, in Irene's belief, was as bare as her pocket.

The children's ward is one of the show features of St. Paul's Hospital. It is at the very top of the building, a spacious room, rather low for its length, but bright and cheerful, with a long row of windows on each side. In summer when the air is clear the children love to scramble up on to the broad window ledges, and look over houses and towers to the blue hills where the enchanted palace glitters in the sun. A row of cots and lockers along each side, a central table with flowers, and a few bright pictures and texts upon the walls, complete the furniture of the ward.

When Sister Irene and her new pupil entered, the room was dark and hushed. A nurse, seated by one of the cots, was sewing by the light of a shaded candle. Irene took Eva's hand and they passed noiselessly up the ward. The air was full of the scent of some lilies of the valley that stood on the table.

There was a whispered colloquy, and soon Eva found herself posted beside a child whose breath came and went with what seemed to her a fearful rapidity. The little patient was asleep, and Eva bent all her energies towards watching it, fearing that every moment might

bring some terrible event. Then, as the panting went on unchanged, her mind employed itself in physiological calculations about it, till she grew tired of multiplying and dividing cubic centimetres and foot-pounds. Then she stood at the window and looked over the lighted streets, where men and women were still hurrying or strolling this way and that. Across the river the great eye of the Clock-tower gazed down on her; above it the lime-light showed that the Commons of England were still at work, forwarding half the world's interests and their own. Beyond, the glare from miles of lamps gave an angry flush to the sky. Amidst those lights men and women at that moment were meeting in brilliant saloons discussing the events of the day, of the age, in earnest or flippant mood; students in their silent rooms, journalists in the midst of din and turmoil, were thinking out and writing what to-morrow would move the world. And she, stranded in this quiet backwater, was listening to the breathing of a child, dead perhaps to-morrow, or doomed at best to a joyless, sordid, and perhaps noxious life in a dark and pestilent court. In either case where was her effort, what impress had she made on the fortunes of her race? "Men, my brothers, men the workers," she sighed. Then she thought of Trevor, but, with hands clenched tightly, forced his image from her mind. The tears were in her eyes as she turned to the child again and put her ear down to

listen to the breathing that still came and went like the ticking of a watch.

The rest of the night gave her little time for idle regrets. Child after child awoke crying, and needed feeding and soothing again to sleep. Eva soon found she had the rudiments of her work to learn. She was awkward with the children, handling them nervously, as she might have held a piece of rare Venetian glass, instead of with the firm soft clasp that they love. She had no notion how to talk to them, for babyland is a realm of savages whose language one must learn before one is greeted as friend. "*Barbarus hic ego sum, quia non intelligor ulli*," Eva said to herself with a sad smile, quoting from her school grammar. She could tell you all about these children's livers and their brains, knew how their nerves and muscles looked under a quarter-inch objective, was versed in the mysteries of their digestion, and could assign to each element of their food its scientific name, its destiny and use ; but when asked to clean a feeding-bottle or mix a meal she found herself useless. The babies cried and struggled in her arms till she lost temper with them, and had to call the nurse to take them from her. At last, her spell of duty over, she left the ward and went downstairs to her simple breakfast, with a dire sense of incompetence and failure.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PRACTICAL OUSTS THE IDYLIC

AH, those prying men of science ! They have torn down the pretty drop-scene that used to hide from us, while it pretended to portray, the childhood of the world. You remember it : the young people footing it in the foreground to the sound of pipe and tabor, the jolly elders behind regaling themselves on grapes and honey-water, the children at the wings bestriding genial carnivores, or teaching them to beg for oaten cakes, the whole subscribed in gilt letters, "Ye Golden Age." The decent curtain has gone, alas ! and we find ourselves gazing on a very carnival of bloodshed ; strength, stealth, and speed, engaged in a triangular duel to the death ; every creature from primate to ultimate preying or being preyed upon.

There are some, indeed, who passionately reject this cruel version of earth's cradlehood, and Trevor was one of them. He was revolted by the idea of a Nature red in tooth and claw. Nature to him was still *alma mater*,

the loving mother, who hears and prompts the prayers of her kneeling children. There is an unfinished fragment of his, written probably for the *Byleaf* in the first flush of his engagement to Ida, entitled "The Idyllic—a now nearly obsolete—Mood." In it he describes the idyllic mood as a temporary release of the soul from the cramping armour which centuries of conflict have forced upon it—an idea for which he was probably indebted to the evolutionists. The soul, thus set free, restored to infant nudity, regains for the moment its primal intimacy with Nature, hears her voice in the woods and streams, sees her finger modelling the clouds, and is filled with love of all things. "What the poet sees and hears in his finest frenzy, that seest thou and hearest now, dumb common mind." The idyllic is at the mercy of all other moods, younger sisters corrupted by the world; but its visits leave a holy impress, and cleave to the memory long after such other moods have passed and been forgotten. "Alike in the individual and in the race. For as the old man's thought leaps back over years of struggle to the magic hour when he sported at Nature's feet, so the race turns ever and again from the records of war and passion to sun itself in the everlasting legend of a Golden Age."

Here the fragment breaks off, possibly because its author was checked in mid-career by that cold douche of practical exigencies which usually comes to chill

the glow of the accepted lover. For most of us perhaps such sudden recall to earth is salutary, all harmful excess of emotional momentum being absorbed in friction with cold-blooded parents. But Trevor had other outlets for his surplus energy, and the world will never know what poems in phrase and colour it has lost, because Dr. Harvey Bland on the one hand, and Sister Irene on the other, had to be reconciled without delay to the contemplated match.

Dr. Bland looked unusually grave when the young lover told him how largely he was dependent upon his aunt's bounty. He at once suggested a meeting of family lawyers, with a view to an arrangement on a business-like footing. But Trevor insisted so passionately on Irene's scrupulous sense of honour and her affection for him, that Dr. Bland was soon persuaded to yield, which, it must be admitted, he did with an admirable grace.

"Acts and deeds were not devised for saints, but for poor sinners like you and me," he said to Trevor, smiling. "Parchments are for the peccable."

"I can vouch for my aunt," the young man replied. "Her word——"

"Say no more. One word from Sister Irene is always enough for me;" and Dr. Bland chuckled to himself at the *double entendre*.

"You will let me take you to see my aunt soon,

won't you, dearest?" said Trevor to Ida that evening. "I know you will like her. At your age I often think she must have been much like you. Not so beautiful, of course; no one was ever that. Nor so lovable. I can just remember her as a very beautiful girl, but with a cold, severe beauty, which you, thank Heaven, have not. The likeness is more in your minds. You have her calm, clear judgment, her delicate sense of honour, her incisive speech. Only you were not made for austerity."

"I can hardly imagine myself a lady abbess, can you?"

"I refuse to imagine you except as you are."

"Ah me! I fear you imagine me for more than I am. Oh, for Burns's 'giftie' to see myself as you see me!"

"Ah, Ida, let me be your mirror. Make your toilet daily before me. See your perfections reflected in my eyes. If you are doubtful of yourself, come and consult me. A tress of thought is straying, I will help you to bind it; your mood is pale and worn, I will teach you to brighten it."

"Nay, you must take me as I am. I will not be a made-up beauty, even mentally. A thought now and then you shall straighten. Alas, they need it often! But for complexion, I must wear what God gave me; your rouge will deceive no one. Your aunt will see me through and through."

"Exactly what I wish. I want her to love you. She will when she knows you; who could help it? And you—you will like her too. I long to bring you together. We shall owe so much to her."

"But surely, Ambrose, she gives you no more than you have a claim to?"

"A moral claim only."

"It does not seem quite fair to you. Of course I know nothing about these matters. But I suppose you have grown to years of discretion; except in wanting to marry me, perhaps. It would be different if it was a father, or even an uncle with no children of his own. But Sister Irene's hopes are not centred in you, are they? She lives for other interests. She has adopted a family. Potentially every gutter-child is hers. Some day she may discover that she is robbing them for you."

"Ah, you do not know her. She is honour, justice itself. She would beggar herself to keep a promise. And we have her promise. Put yourself in her place, Ida. Would it not distress you to be asked to be bound legally to do something that you had pledged yourself to? Every man of honour would resent it. Do not let us take the lawyer's view of human nature. I have spoken to Dr. Bland and he agrees with me."

"Then you have the lawyer's view after all," laughed Ida.

If there was one point on which Trevor would have expressed himself with more confidence than on any other, it was that Irene and Ida would mutually like, admire, and impress each other. To him they were both women of open, generous mind, far above those small jealousies that are wont to crop up so irrationally and so disastrously in the relationships of feeble persons. They were both clever, but with a difference which should enable the one to appreciate the other. "One likes his like, but not his double," was a favourite apophthegm of Trevor's, and he expected it to hold good in the present case. But alas for him who counts on any woman seeing another woman with his eyes! In reality Irene and Ida were so predisposed to antagonism that open hostility, or at least an armed neutrality, was in the end almost inevitable. Each resented Trevor's dependence on the other, and however honestly they might determine to try to like each other, the radical difference in their aims and characters was bound sooner or later to declare itself.

Their first encounter was a frigid one. The very kiss that Irene's cold lips imprinted on Ida's cheek was more like the stern courtesy with which the ambassador of a threatening power is handed his passport, than the first friendly greeting of a new ally. Unsmiling eyes belied the caress; for Irene at that moment was thinking of a sad little white-hooded figure upstairs, and

could not grimace to her rival. As the two women faced each other the contrast between their beauty was striking. On the one hand pallor, features thinly but beautifully chiselled, clear resolute eyes, above them a smooth band of iron-gray hair, inlaid, as it were, between the ivory of the brow and the snowy whiteness of the sister's cap. On the other hand, light wandering tresses, and warm soft cheeks, eyes that freely broke into smiles, and lips like those of a profile on an old Greek coin.

Irene led Ida to the hard horsehair sofa, which was her room's sole niggardly concession to indolence, and took her seat beside her.

"I knew your father," she said, with an effort to be friendly.

"I have heard him speak of you often," Ida replied, stroking the horsehair. "He always came home with an ascetic fit on. I got to associate hospitals with cold mutton."

"He helped us very much; he was so practical and farseeing," observed Irene, taking no notice of Ida's artlessly uttered impertinence.

"He had good advice for every one, I believe," said Ida carelessly.

"You must miss him very much," observed Irene, "as indeed we do here."

Ida resented her father's relationship to herself being coupled with his formal intimacy with these maiden

ladies, over whose primness, she remembered, the Arch-deacon had often made merry in his more jocund moods.

"I try to do as he would have advised. I wonder what he would have thought of my latest move," she said, smiling at Trevor.

"There you must consult your own heart," Irene said gravely.

"Oh, that is thought very bad counsel nowadays," cried Miss Bannatyne.

Irene still looked grave. This flippant treatment of serious questions annoyed her.

"I only hope Ambrose has consulted his heart as diligently as I have mine," Ida resumed.

"There was no need, dear. It obtruded its advice," her lover said, looking proudly at her.

"What a pretty way of putting it!" cried Ida.

"Ambrose always had a turn for saying pretty things," Irene put in, indisposed to encourage any show of Trevor's infatuation.

"Then he is most unfairly gifted," said Ida, "for he has a turn for painting pretty things as well."

"Hear her!" cried Trevor; "a nice formula for a rising painter."

"Well, don't you paint beautiful things?" Ida inquired.

"I have beautiful things to paint," said Trevor in a tone that his aunt was not meant to hear.

"Ambrose is right," Irene observed. "It is not worth while being a painter only to paint pretty things."

"Don't they sell?" asked Ida innocently.

"Sell!" ejaculated Sister Irene. "My dear Ambrose, have you not explained your views to your—to Miss Bannatyne?"

"Ida knows I have never exhibited," said Trevor, "and that is equivalent to never selling."

"Oh, but it will be different now," cried Ida; "you must be acknowledged. I long to see the people crowding round his pictures in the exhibitions, Sister."

"I cannot bear the idea of it," Irene said. "My views may be old-fashioned, but I would sooner Ambrose never painted again than see him haggling with people like a shopman. I say nothing of the dignity of the artist; Ambrose will tell you about that. All I am anxious to preserve is the dignity of the gentleman."

"But we are so much less stiff nowadays," said Ida; "no one now thinks it a disgrace to earn money. Gentlemen may do anything. I have heard of one who owns a milk-shop."

"Ah, an artist in water-colour," suggested Trevor, who had been listening with a mixture of amusement and perplexity.

"Probably," rejoined Ida, "and with your dread of publicity."

Irene felt the gap between her and her nephew widening.

"Our views used to be the same, Ambrose," she said. "You always declared you would never exhibit."

"Probably I never shall," replied Trevor.

After that Irene took them into the wards, and while Ida was talking to one of the patients, Trevor whispered to his aunt, "Is she not beautiful?"

"Very, and I will hope more than beautiful."

"As beautiful in mind as in body," said Trevor.

"I wish she were a little more serious. But the Archdeacon had just that way. Pray, dear Ambrose, do not be beguiled into flippancy."

Trevor was silent.

"I will not affect to be entirely satisfied with your choice," his aunt added, "but it shall make no difference to you."

"Are we not to see the children?" asked Ida, coming back to them.

"Not to-day, my dear, I think."

"Oh, I am sorry. I hoped to see Eva in her uniform."

"It would unsettle her. The poor child has had much to go through."

"What!" cried Trevor.

"Oh, don't you know?" laughed Ida. "She caught her own pet theory leaking and so fell out with science. It must have been a wrench;" which speech in Irene's eyes all but filled up the measure of her iniquities.

CHAPTER XVII

DRIVEN TO MARKET

WHENEVER the exhilaration of breathing upland air in company with her lover passed into the exhaustion which is sure sooner or later to overtake those unused to a thin atmosphere, Miss Bannatyne had only to walk down to St. George's Road and visit her friends the Doncasters in order to ensure a complete and speedy recovery. By nature she was more fitted for high life than for the higher life, and the rectory training had certainly been a better preparation for high living than for high thinking. Still, as there is no one probably amongst the hedonists who is altogether and at all seasons blind to the beauty of earnestness, and no one amongst the earnest quite deaf to the temptations of hedonism, so Ida Bannatyne was at times tempted out of herself by the gospel of self-sacrifice, which had been preached to her equally in the glowing words of her lover and the gushing utterances of Eva Sumner. Her resolve to seek in marriage an opportunity for helpfulness rather

than an avenue to luxury kept aglow for some days, but as it chilled under the spray of what she called her common-sense, she began to long for the comfortable air of the lowlands wherein she had been brought up. In the drawing-room of the Doncasters she breathed again. There she found herself upon a fen of cultivated selfishness which rose at best to the feeble elevation of the bazaar—the soup-kitchen and parish-district plateau was in another county—and thus, though it made an excellent return to its tillers, gave but a mean outlook upon the world; so that to the dwellers on that plain the high aims and soaring thoughts that reign in generous bosoms were as inconceivable as the wonders of the high Alps to one who has lived his life on the shores of the Zuyder Zee.

• It was not without trepidation that Ida announced her engagement to her friends, and she would sooner have bared her bosom to their embroidery scissors than have exposed her mild altruistic leanings to the gauntlet of their twitched eyebrows and scornful nostrils.

“You might have flown higher, Ida,” was her aunt’s comment.

“Isn’t it better to give yourself at a low figure than to sell yourself at a high one?” Ida inquired.

“Oh, it’s all selling, if it comes to that. You may cheat yourself into a belief that you are playing for love; but when a pretty girl marries an income, I know she

is thinking more of her husband's bank-book than of his *beaux yeux*."

"Need one be thinking of either?" Ida asked.

"Why, what else is there?"

"Well, one might be attracted by character."

"Character!" echoed Mrs. Doncaster. "I only know two kinds of men—those with character and those without it. You fall in love with a man's force, and find yourself tied for life to a tyrant; or you are charmed by gentle manners and delicate sympathy, and for the rest of your days are bored with insipid devotion. Character need not count for much in courtship."

"West-end callers don't exhaust the male sex, dear aunt," Ida suavely remarked. "Character is a question of brains. You won't find the finer *nuances* amongst a small-headed——"

"You think we shouldn't appreciate them if we did," Mary Doncaster broke in.

"I think that Providence has treated you very kindly, Mary," said Ida.

"It has treated you kindly in giving you a man with brains," remarked Mrs. Doncaster.

"Which of course you, dear, have brains enough to value," Mary interpolated.

"The question is, What does he do with them," said Mrs. Doncaster, "beyond captivating beauty?"

"Oh, he writes and paints. His pictures are really wonderful."

"And yet he won't sell them, you say. I call that wrapping his talent in a napkin. It's the way with these geniuses. They are so often *manqués*; somehow or other they don't arrive. Either they are paralysed by "nerves," or they are always asking *cui bono*, or they develop some silly prejudice, like your friend. Really I think we idiots are of more use in the world than they."

"Perhaps on the whole we are," Ida observed drily.

"A genius should always ally himself with one of us," said Mrs. Doncaster. "Then the world might have a chance of benefiting by his talent. I congratulate Mr. Trevor. I think he has shown wisdom. You must make yourself his market-woman, my dear."

Ida explained her lover's dilemma. By offering his pictures for sale he would mortally offend his aunt, and probably lose his income; while if the income were to be settled upon him, it would be strictly on the condition that he should not paint for money. On this point Irene's prejudices were immovable.

Mrs. Doncaster's advice was Machiavellian: "Get the settlement, Ida. Don't marry till you have it. Promise anything, if you must. After marriage you will get your own way."

The advice did not commend itself greatly to Ida, and she said nothing.

"I should have thought," her aunt continued, "that Sister Irene would have been above the stupid county-town idea of a gentleman's dignity. Nowadays a gentleman may do anything to help his income. The smell of the city is the best scent he can use. As for painting for money, why, Lord Poitou says he pays his tailor's bill by the pictures he sells—'dresses in canvas' he calls it; so I am sure there is no earthly reason why Mr. Trevor should not do the same."

"It is the publicity that he objects to, I think—the criticisms of the press," observed Ida.

"Lord Poitou does not care twopence what the papers say of his pictures, so long as people buy them; but then they are mostly civil to a lord."

"If they were spiteful to Ambrose, I believe it would send him out of his mind."

"A commoner can't always expect praise, my dear. Men who are afraid of criticism should take care to be born above it."

Trevor's picture of Ida still hung unfinished in the studio, under a silk covering. She had often asked to see it, but he as often had begged her to wait. With fuller knowledge his early rendering of her seemed to him inadequate, if not untruthful. He had painted it under the spell of her beauty; now he was under the spell of her mind. Ida's clear-cut views and the easy confidence with which she presented them were begin-

ning to gain for her something of the same influence over him that Sumner had. Touched as they were by a new emotion, they were to him like the sharp silhouette of a mountain range reddening in the dawn. His portrait of her seemed to him now too schoolmissish, too unformed. The Ida of the picture entreated love, the Ida he knew commanded it.

One day when Trevor was lunching in Savile Row, Mrs. Bland attacked him on the subject. "Are we to wait till it is an old master?" she asked.

"Or I a young mistress?" added Ida gaily.

Trevor was at a loss for an excuse. "Come, then; this very afternoon," he said.

Miss Bannatyne thanked him with a smile and clinched the proposal. "We will walk, Ambrose; and aunt shall drive to meet us," she decided.

"Why won't you exhibit?" Ida asked her lover ere they had walked a hundred paces.

"Why? There are many whys to it. Whys seldom work singly, I have noticed. For one reason I am too lazy; for another, I dread the critics, especially the modern numskull. But my ground-motive, as the Germans say, is that I loathe anything that smacks of advertising."

"Surely that is setting yourself against the custom of the day," argued Ida. "How else are you to make your influence felt? If exhibiting is advertising, the

best artists have advertised themselves for the last hundred years."

"Yes, and much has art gained by it. When the artist had to be sought in his studio, he was sure of intelligent patrons. Or when, as in the old days, he painted for the people, he stood above them, a teacher. He appealed to the common heart of humanity, not to the pockets of the well-to-do. But when he paints for the exhibitions, he must let himself down to the average dining-room intellect. He drops from teacher to upholsterer."

"Possibly," Ida answered. "A common demand is sure to be met. But that is no reason why you, in your circumstances, should try to meet it. You need not let yourself down to namby-pambyism. You could not if you tried."

"Better men than I have fallen," said Trevor.

"And others have stood firm. I should hate to see your pictures amongst the nursery dramas and cottage idylls. But why not show them to the select, or, if you dread the respectables, treat the East-end to a sight of them? You want your pictures to teach; how can they teach unless they are seen? You publish what you write; why not publish what you paint? What is the *Byleaf* but an exhibition?"

"It bids fair to be," said Trevor, with a rueful smile. "But don't you see the difference? The

Byleaf does not advertise me. No man of self-respect should advertise himself. If he does so, he risks being taken for a quack. You wouldn't trust your health to a doctor who paraded the streets with circus horses and a trumpeter; or your soul's health to the leader of a salvation band. Yet you will go to see pictures at the instance of a sandwich man; and, mind you, the seeing of bad pictures is likely to do you quite as much harm as the nostrum of the quack, be he doctor or preacher. No, *Ida*, you will never see my name on a wandering notice-board."

"You say the public drag the painters down," said *Ida*, "but do not the painters also draw the public up? You get a double effect."

"A resultant."

"Well, if all the best painters desert the exhibitions, the resultant drops; the general taste falls to a lower level."

"Taste is a mere mental accomplishment. The true artist's mission is not to refine taste. He goes deeper; he teaches the soul. Can he do it in a crowded gallery? The visitors come either to be amused or to flatter their self-love by posing as critics. The real artist cares, works for neither. He gives the law to the critics, not they to him. Approach his work as a critic, and a veil at once falls over it. You are not in the key for his teaching. The real artist cares not what the critics or

the public think of his work. He works by his own standard, not theirs. He paints out of the fulness of his soul; he is born to do it. And, believe me, he carries in his own mind a harsher and a truer critic than any of the professional phrase-twisters. What he says to himself now, they will be retailing fifty years hence. There's my conception of the true artist. For my part I dread the critics; you may complete the syllogism."

"I question both your premises."

"Then I am on the horns of a dilemma. Either way the conclusion is the same—I am not the ideal artist."

"How can one decide till one sees your work? Ambrose, you must exhibit."

"Would it please you very much?"

"Very much."

"Criticisms included?"

"We will read and laugh at them ten years hence. No critic's sting keeps sharp so long as that."

Mrs. Bland was late at the rendezvous, and the picture was uncovered for Ida alone. Trevor watched with delight her eyes brightening and her cheeks flushing as she gazed at it. The quality in it which to him seemed to mar its success as a truthful portrait conveyed to her the subtlest flattery.

"Am I like that?" she asked in a pleased whisper. Then with a sudden movement she laid her hand on

the painter's sleeve, "Ambrose, forget what I have said. How can *I*," and she pointed to the portrait, "presume to influence you?"

"What is life worth without your influence, *Ida dear*?" said Trevor.

"Not against your better judgment, Ambrose. Let me, if you will, unlock your impulses. But don't let me argue them down; don't change your purpose to please me. You must not exhibit. You will not?"

"Nay, but I will," he answered. "A dozen of them in some back-room in Bond Street."

Mrs. Bland came into the studio with a flustered look and sank into a chair. "My dear, I am so sorry," she exclaimed; "I had to drive Dr. Bland to the station. A telegram came from Eastmere just after you had started. Sir Ethelbert Armstrong—you know him, *Ida*—not expected to recover, poor man. Dr. Bland has gone to him. And I forgot to give him his reading-lamp."

The news sent *Ida's* thoughts on a new journey, away to the old familiar scenes at Eastmere, and to her rejected lover. Trevor's voice, as he enlightened Mrs. Bland's perplexity as to the meaning of his picture, came to her as a far-off sound of secondary interest. And as she drove home with her aunt "Poor Eric" still formed the text of her reflections.

CHAPTER XVIII

IDA ARMS HER KNIGHTS

WHEN Dr. Harvey Bland stepped out on to the Eastmere platform he was encountered by the grave face of the local practitioner, and heard that Sir Ethelbert Armstrong had had a second seizure and died an hour ago.

"Captain Armstrong begs you will excuse his not seeing you," said the Eastmere doctor, "but he is overwhelmed by the suddenness of the blow. He was much attached to his father in spite of their differences."

"Poor fellow!" returned Dr. Bland sympathetically. "Poor fellow! I ought to have warned him. I foretold this. Ten years ago I foretold it. Sir Ethelbert came to us to insure, but I would not take him at any price. They frowned at me in the directors' parlour; asked me to review my decision. Sir Ethelbert looked good for another thirty years; other offices had accepted him. But I knew his arteries were rotten and held out. Perhaps they will give me credit now;" and Dr. Bland

found it hard to dissemble the content he felt at the justification of his prevision.

The two doctors walked up and down the sleepy platform waiting for the up-train, and gradually their talk glided into more cheerful channels. Dr. Bland opened his well-stocked anecdote wallet and kept his companion on the verge of laughter till he stepped into the train. As it steamed out of the station, the local doctor (a quiet watcher of the world, with more penetration than he gained or wished to gain credit for) came down the platform with a face on which the smiles of derision and amusement struggled for mastery. That night he added some caustic paragraphs to his MS. chapter "On Postern-gate-keys."

Meanwhile Dr. Bland too was smiling—smiling complacently at the flying fields. He would be home in time for his dinner and evening rubber. He had spent a lazy but profitable afternoon over a new French novel, and his journey, unlike most journeys of the sort, had not involved the sacrifice of a single set meal. He had seen his anticipations fulfilled, and his acumen both as man of science and man of business triumphantly justified. What with his afternoon's fee and the profit on his loan to Eric, he would have made six weeks' income out of these Armstrongs—supercilious aristocrats that they were—with no more effort than that involved in a brief chat in his consulting-room and a half-hour's

entertainment of a dull-witted country doctor. The new baronet would be his friend for life, a useful friend, if he were only wise enough not to fling away his splendid position and estates in the quest of childish pleasures.

"I have been to your part of the country and back since I saw you, Ida," said Dr. Bland as he sat at dinner with his wife and niece.

"So aunt told me. How is Sir Ethelbert?"

"Dead."

"Dead!" echoed the ladies.

"He died just as I said he would ten years ago."

"You have foreseen it all that time?" asked Ida.
"Did he know it too?"

"He knew my opinion," said Dr. Bland in a tone that implied "It was his own affair if he did not act on it."

"How terrible! And Captain Armstrong, did he know it?"

"No, his father kept it from him, and it was not for me to undeceive him. Poor Sir Eric! I am told he is fearfully cut up."

It grated on Ida to hear the title transferred so glibly. She had never known much of Sir Ethelbert; but she had more than once been his guest at the Abbey, and could almost see him now, with straight lithe figure and head well thrown back, threading his way through the brilliant, crowded rooms. Then she thought of his heir,

her friend Eric, wandering alone through those same rooms, now dark and silent, and her face softened.

Her thoughts were scattered by Dr. Bland's voice. "What a fortune's wheel is life!" he said. "Here was this young man last week without the money to pay his tailor's bill; to-day he is a baronet with thousands a year, and six weeks hence I should not be surprised to see him member of Parliament."

"Captain Armstrong has no leanings that way, I am sure," exclaimed Ida.

"Well, there is no doubt the Tories will put very strong pressure upon him," said Dr. Bland. "Eastmere has been held by an Armstrong for generations. They will never let him leave the door open for a Radical."

Armstrong, as it turned out, did stand for Eastmere. The pressure of his party, however, had little to do with his decision; he turned the most obdurate ear to all their entreaties, until one morning there came to him a note from Ida, and then the local wire-pullers suddenly found a willing ear turned to their entreaties.

"They say you are refusing to contest the dear old stupid borough," Ida wrote, "and I can hardly believe it. Surely you will not let yourself sink into a mere squire! This is the one opening you may have to a worthy career. I shall be disappointed in you if you do not stand."

Ida had not despatched these lines without some

hesitation. When the idea of writing first suggested itself to her, the Proprieties frowned upon it, and for Ida the Proprieties were still hedged with some divinity. But she could not reconcile herself to regarding and treating Eric with the icy reserve appropriate to a rejected lover. She longed to be married in order that she might once more resume her old friendly monitorial attitude towards him. Tenderness apart, she felt attached to Eric by a sense of responsibility for him. By her rejection of him she had cut off his main chance of rehabilitating himself, and she proved to her own satisfaction that she was bound to disregard maidenly scruples, and to use all her power to guide him towards other avenues of reform. As member for Eastmere, with rooms in town, he would be much about her and within the sphere of her influence, bringing with him the breeze of politics and the fragrance of good society, and receiving in return instruction in which sound sense and high purpose would be felicitously combined. On the other hand, as a mere vegetating squire, Eric would be sure to drift ever farther away from her, and would degenerate from sheer *ennui* either into a dull stable-lounger and turnip-trampler, or into a reckless racecourse profligate.

So the letter was sent, and a few days later the Conservative press announced that Sir Eric Armstrong had been prevailed upon by the earnest representations of his party to stand for Eastmere, and that he would be

returned unopposed, the other side having failed to find a candidate.

In making this latter statement, however, the papers were premature. Two days after posting her letter to Eric, Ida was startled by a visit from John Sumner, whom she had not seen since she wrote to refuse his offer.

He gave her a frank hand-shake and settled himself near her in an easy-chair. "I thought you were at Baku," she said.

"So I was for a night. But I was telegraphed home, and here I am. I hope you don't mind it. You must let me congratulate you. Trevor is the best of good fellows,—a heart of gold. You won't let him over-dream himself. I envy him his happiness terribly. I still think we two should have pulled well together. There, I won't worry you. We will be good cousins, or step-cousins, again. I am glad the mother is out. To-day my visit is to you; you have the special knowledge I want just now. When in difficulty consult a specialist; that is the modern tip. So here I am. I have been asked to put up for Eastmere."

"What!" cried Ida, half rising from her chair.

"Eh! Do you think I have no chance?"

Ida collected her wits and answered calmly, "I thought you would have gone in for some big place more worthy of you. You ought not to waste yourself on a pocket borough."

"Well, I used to declare I would never sit for a hole and corner, but one's ideas draw in their horns when one touches actualities. I could be very well content with Eastmere. For one thing, it has never sent up a Radical before."

"To tell the truth, I don't think it ever will," said Ida. "I cannot promise you success."

"I am sorry for that. I am relying a good deal on the weakness of my opponent—a mere empty-headed squire, I hear. But I suppose you know him. He is the magnate of the place."

"Yes, I know him, and so do you. You have met him here."

"No; have I? Well, I am going to return the compliment, and meet him there. What about him?"

"He is not brilliant. But he is an Armstrong, and that means much at Eastmere. I don't advise you to stand. It is simply throwing money away."

"Oh, I mean to stand, if only for the practice of the thing. A young politician has to show he can't win an impossible seat before his party will look at him for a possible one. It shall not cost me much."

"I don't think I would stand," Ida persisted.

"You are very good," said Sumner doggedly, as he rose to go, "but I have made up my mind."

She rose too, and coming up to him, put her hand on his arm, "Would you like to do me a favour, John?"

she asked, gravely looking up at him. Sumner gazed at her inquiringly: she did not often call him by his Christian name.

"Of course I should. What is it?"

"Don't stand for Eastmere."

"Eh?"

"Don't stand. I ask it as a favour. I take great interest in Sir Eric Armstrong. I have known him since he was a boy. This is his only chance of getting into Parliament, while you can get in when you please. It may be the turning-point of his life. Hitherto he has been wild and reckless, and now if he is elected it will give him a serious object in life. Please don't oppose him."

She looked so beautiful standing there before him and pleading with large blue eyes and tremulous lips, that no one could have long resisted her.

Sumner looked away and moved uneasily. "I don't think the House of Commons ought to be turned into a reformatory for ne'er-do-wells," he said, with a touch of sulkiness. "But with you women every question is personal."

A sharp retort rose to Ida's lips, but she said simply, "I would have done the same for you, John, had you been in his place."

"Ay, but in mine, what would you do? Suppose that you had hurried across Europe night and day to

get back, and had your trip spoiled for you, as I have, would you give up your ambition, mortally offend your party and leave it in the lurch, for the problematical regeneration of an unknown good-for-nothing? I don't think you ought to ask it of me."

Ida began to feel irritated at his obstinacy. "I wish I had not," she said with some petulance; "I did not expect to be refused;" and she turned away as if to end the interview.

For a second or two Sumner stood watching her. "You make me feel a bear," he said at length; "I wish you had asked anything else. But you shall have your way. I will give it up, Ida. For your sake only, remember."

Then he hurried away without waiting for his mother's return.

The moment he had gone Ida sank down on the sofa, clasping her hands. She had acted on the moment's impulse, and before Sumner had left the house she was already regretting her precipitancy. "What is coming to me?" she sighed. The sound of the house-door closing was for the moment a relief to her, as it seemed to take the decision out of her hands, and prevent any attempt on her part to get it rescinded. But the more she thought of her action, the more questionable it appeared to her. Her motives would be open to misconstruction. It would be said that it was ungenerous of her to put forth

all her influence over one old admirer and to damage his career for the sake of another. She ought to have held herself severely neutral between them. And yet she could not see Eric's prospects jeopardised without an attempt to prevent it. Still, if the seat were safe, might not a contest put him on his mettle, bring out his manliness, and make him value his position more when gained than a mere walk-over?

At this point Ida's meditations were interrupted by Mrs. Bland, who came in with face and voice aglow with excitement. She was brimming over with joy at John's sudden return and the prospect of his election for Eastmere.

"He might have waited and told me himself," she complained, "instead of leaving me to hear it from a stranger. It's always John's way. If it hadn't been for my meeting Mr. Hood, I should have known nothing about it. Every one knows what he is doing before I do. But I forgive him. John Sumner, M.P. How proud we shall be of him!"

These words of Mrs. Bland's settled Ida's doubts. She could not bear to think of herself as the means of dashing the golden hopes of that good simple soul. She at once retired to her boudoir and wrote a note to Sumner, withdrawing her request, and entreating him to continue his candidature.

"It will be an uphill fight," she wrote, "but if you

care not to pain me, let it be a chivalrous one. Your tongue is a terrible weapon ; be chary with it. Remember always that your opponent is, like yourself, a dear friend of mine, and that whatever wounds you suffer or inflict will be wounds that I too shall feel."

She wrote to Eric by the same post to give him early notice of Sumner's candidature. "It is my wish that he should stand against you," she said. "The seat is safely yours, and afterwards you will be prouder of it for having had to fight for it. You have the advantage of fighting on your own ground, but I know you will use it like a soldier."

CHAPTER XIX

SWORD WINS

Hugh Sumner to Ida Bannatyne.

ST. AUSTIN'S PRIORY, EASTMERE,
Sunday, —th June.

"MY DEAR IDA—Here is the first despatch from your special at the seat of war. The commander-in-chief and his solitary aide-de-camp—I have to double my part, you see—arrived at the scene of action late on Friday night, and established headquarters at this rambling old house, which had been placed at our disposal by a wealthy burgher of the town. You know the house, no doubt, with its black oak door studded like a hobnailed shoe (observe the local colour of my simile), its deep-set windows, and its gargoyles, whose malicious grimaces Time has almost softened into benignity. Possibly you know the garden too. At last I realise the special charm of a town-garden. As I sit in a retired corner and watch the banks of old-world flowers, and the mouldering walls peering

through the gnarled branches of neglected fruit-trees, which once hung golden drops and jargonelles for buxom friars,—why, but for the cut of my clothes and the heavenly fragrance of my tobacco, I could imagine myself living under the fourth Edward. The walls shut out almost every sight and sound of this world, but the gray tower of St. Austin's, rising sheer above them, scowls down on one with shutterless eyes, and ever and anon clangs a reminder of the world that is to come. Its brazen tongue is scolding at me now, because I prefer sitting out here writing to putting on glove and sanctimony and marching demurely to evening prayer. What a town it is for bell-ringing! Surely they must ring a bell for every boot they finish at the hideous factory by the river.

“So far my pen has been but stretching legs and trying its paces. Now to business. Saturday was commonplace, devoted to reconnoitring and interviewing. To-day began with an event. We were sitting in my shady corner after breakfast, studying our canvassing books, when John's man shuffles up to us. ‘A gentleman to see you, sir.’ And round the corner saunters—who do you think? Why, who on earth but my dear old Eric, looking as spick in his mourning as a new black pin! (You know what chums we have been ever since Blandish first brought him to Savile Row.) He was a little stiff and embarrassed at first,

and so was John, but I soon had him settled comfortably between us with a cigarette, and we began our palaver.

“‘I don’t know what my party would think of my being here,’ said Eric, holding out his cigarette and looking at its curl of smoke, ‘and, to tell the truth, I don’t much care. I warned them I should do as I like. I suppose it’s a rule of-the game that each of us should try to make out the other a blackguard and a fool, but I have no notion of playing it that way. Why on earth can’t we two go through this fight like gentlemen? I don’t come to ask a favour, or to beg your forbearance, Mr. Sumner. I simply say that for my part I will have no hitting below the belt. There are roughs on my side as well as yours, and I want to apologise beforehand for any dirty tricks they may play before I can stop them. Only yesterday I had a hundred wretched placards torn down that had been printed without my knowledge.’ John duly expressed his thanks. ‘There goes that costly broadsheet you were so proud of, my dear John,’ said I to myself.

“Eric went on. ‘I know you are much more fit for Parliament than I am, Mr. Sumner. And if you had been on the right side, there is no one I would have sooner made way for. But, you see, we are quiet, steady-going people here. We like the good old views. And

you must admit that mine have been longer in bottle than yours. Surely the people here have a right to a member of their own way of thinking.'—'Exactly,' cried John; 'that's why I am here.'—'I was not reckoning the boot hands,' said Eric; 'they are new-comers. I don't see why they should overrule the native opinion.'—'Why, but for them,' John retorted, 'you would have no member at all.'—'Better that than a Radical,' Eric burst out. 'Forgive me, I meant to be so conciliatory,' and he held out his hand frankly to John and smiled an apology for his small escape of steam.

"Just then St. Austin's bell, which had been clanging for morning service, began to slacken and falter just like the breathing of a dying man. Eric jumped up. 'I shall be late,' he said. 'Confound these politicians; they won't even let us go to the same church. You will be looked for at St. Crispin's this morning. By the way, in the afternoon it might be worth your while to visit the Primitive Methodists; but pray don't say I gave you the tip—Good-bye;' and Eric went off with a sly wink at me.

"'There's a fine score to be had off him now,' said I to John as we meandered to the cobblers' church. 'Tell your next meeting that he confessed you were the better candidate.'—'What do you take me for?' he cried, flushing. Poor old John! it's so easy to get a rise out of him."

The same to the same.

ST. AUSTIN'S PRIORY,
Thursday.

"I went to one of Eric's meetings last night. He speaks much better than I expected; has evidently been well coached in all the jargon of his party. He has a few good points by heart, I fancy, and when he gets in sight of them he throws back his head, and his eyes twinkle, and over he goes in splendid style. On the flat his form is much less showy.

"He spoke very nicely of John. 'He is an excellent fellow, gentlemen,' he said, 'and a very clever fellow to boot—a little too clever, too advanced for Eastmere, I think. Maybe we shall catch him up by and by. But we don't want a member to represent the views of our grandchildren. What would you think of a master who set his men to turn out boots in the fashion of next century? Perhaps you will say it's better to be before the times than behind them, that new fashions are better than old ones. But most of us here, I think, prefer the latter. The old boots have served us well; they have grown to fit us; we are very comfortable in them.'—'You are, no doubt,' a grimy fellow shouted close to me. Eric looked at him full. 'Isn't the gentleman comfortable at Eastmere?' he asked. 'Well, he can easily go back where he came from. We didn't

ask him to come, and we shan't miss him if he goes.' There was something of a row at this, but Eric faced it like a man and soon had them quiet again. The boot hands, it seems, are not over popular in the town.

"Before he sat down he entreated courteous treatment for John. 'Reject him civilly, I beg you, gentlemen, he said. 'When you go courting a young woman, and she refuses you, you don't expect her to fly out at you with all the bad words in the dictionary. If she is a nice girl, she is kind and amiable to you; in short, she lets you down as gently as she can. That is how I would have you treat my opponent. A "no" can be resolute without being waspish. Send him off, if you like, but pray don't let him take away a bad impression of your manners.'

"Eric had spied me out, and took me off with him to supper at the Abbey, where we sat talking half the night. When I chaffed him about that last simile he coloured and at length confessed his secret and yours. Then I knew why he had acted so nobly to John. Oh, Ida, why couldn't you have married him? He is such a good fellow; and now he looks and acts ten years older than when he was in town. We have agreed to give up being butterflies and turn caterpillars again, put on sober clothes, and stick to the round of a single plant. It must be admitted that Eric's is a sufficiently succulent one."

The same to the same.

ST. AUSTIN'S PRIORY,
Friday.

"I can't tell what has come over John. He is fighting the battle half-heartedly, as if he did not wish to win it. He won't put forth his best effort. Sometimes at his meetings I think he is going to pull himself together and be down on Eric in his old sledge-hammer style. He fills his chest and takes a step forward, till every one is agog for something startling, and then suddenly the flame falters and dies out in a most lame and impotent conclusion. What a hero these cobblers would make of him if he would only hammer the nails into his opponent as they sole a boot! And he could do it if he liked; no one better. As it is, all his fighting is up in the air, in the region of abstract politics, far above shoemakers' intelligence. He never treats them to personalities, and consequently they gape at him for the first half-hour, and shout at him for the second. I suppose he thinks so poorly of Eric that he proposes to fight him with one hand. He is mistaken. Eric will come in at the top of the poll, and no one will rejoice at it more than your faithful correspondent."

The same to the same.

EASTMERE ABBEY,
Wednesday Evening.

"DEAR IDA—I sent you a telegram this afternoon to enable you to reassure mother about our safety. I could not tell what the evening catch-pennies would make out of our little scrimmage. I can imagine their shriek. 'Riots at Eastmere—murderous onslaught on the defeated candidate—gallant rescue by the new M.P.' Thank Heaven, we are all safe. But for Eric I fancy the noble army of sawbones would have lost a promising recruit. As it is, we are not much the worse for it. Eric and his cousin, the Colonel, are only scratched and sprained. I have a left arm broken, and poor John is groaning in bed with a cut head. He has only himself to thank for it; but for his obstinacy we should be back safe and sound in Savile Row by now.

"I told you all about the polling in my last. We got late to bed, to be roused early this morning by a letter which Eric had sent over by a groom. He warned us that trouble was brewing, and begged us to get off quietly by the early train. But John would not hear of it, in spite of my expostulations. He declared that he would not slink away without hearing the result of the fight for all the bootmakers in the world. So at ten o'clock we appeared at the town-hall. There was a shouting

crowd outside and some ugly-looking roughs amongst it. There were cheers when Eric was declared duly elected, but neither he nor John could get a quiet hearing.

"Eric wanted to drive us to the station, but John again put his back up and refused. He was not disposed to grace his rival's triumph, he said to me. So we had to push through the crowd as best we could. We escaped with a little hustling, got safely across the town bridge, and were preparing to shake off the dust of our shoes at this degenerate town, which had imposed on us such a bootless errand. We were half-way down Water Street, which was quite deserted, and within sight of the station, when a stream of howling roughs came rushing straight across our path. I had forgotten that wretched foot-bridge. I wanted to make a dash for the station, and I really think we might have got off safely, but again John's wretched obstinacy blocked the way, and we were soon standing with our backs to a wall in face of a yelling mob.

"There was a short parley. Their spokesman, a truculent-looking villain, if ever I saw one, demanded money of John for the votes they had given him. 'Not a farthing,' shouted John, squaring his arms.

"Between ourselves, I fear the disappointment of these ruffians must be laid at my door. In my unofficial capacity I thought I might safely promise anything the

electors seemed to have a fancy for. Canvassing is so much more pleasant when you are glib with promises.

"When they heard John's answer, which I must admit was sufficiently resolute, there was a roar of disgust, and then they made for us. John knocked down one, and I broke my knuckles on another. For a moment they hesitated. They were packed so closely around us that they could not use their fists to advantage; your untrained pugilist needs a wide berth for the swing of his arms. Still we got evidence enough that the shoulders of Eastmere 'lamb' are by no means of light weight.

"At last the brutes began to resort to the brickbat, a time-honoured weapon, in the handling of which one's Christian education turns out to have been deplorably deficient. We had almost suffered the fate of Achan and his family before we realised what was coming. One missile knocked off John's hat, the next sent the blood streaming down his face from a cut on his noble brow. I put up my arm to escape his fate; a crash, and my hand fell helpless to my side.

"The game seemed up with both of us, and I was wondering how poor old mother would bear it, when I fancied I heard the sound of wheels. For a moment I thought it was only the beating in my own ears. Then the crowd moved apart, and up the street I caught a glimpse of Eric's phaeton dashing towards us. He was

standing up, lashing his grays into a gallop. They were up to us in a second. He drove right into the mob, scattering them right and left, and pulled his horses on to their haunches right in front of us. In a moment the groom was at their heads, and Eric and his cousin had jumped down and were fighting their way to us. By Jove, how they fought! The mob kindly left us alone, at liberty to enjoy the sport. Helpless wretches, we could do nothing but look on. John was leaning against the wall, faint with loss of blood, and I could not move without agony. It was lovely to see the play of Eric's left. Three bootmakers went down before it, one after another, and lay huddled up on the cobbles. By the time the police came running up of course all danger was over.

"Reading this, you may think that Eric did no more than any other man would have done in the circumstances. But it was absolutely taking his life in his hands when he rushed in amongst the crowd. These ruffians stick at nothing. I hear that ugly knives were found on some of them, and but for Eric's prompt fist I doubt whether he or any of us would now be here. Thank Heaven we are here, at the Abbey—Eric would not hear of our going back to St. Austin's—and not very much the worse for our adventure. My arm scarcely pains me at all now it is put up, but I am very helpless, as you will see from my handwriting. John is in no

danger, and a good night will do wonders for him. I hope the brickbat has bled him of a little of his obstinacy; eased him of some of the pride on his brow. Eric is the kindest of hosts. Every word and look of his makes me admire him the more as a brave, gentle, chivalrous Englishman. He is showing character, and I have almost ceased to regret that he is not cleverer. In Savile Row we make too much of what we call 'brains,' forgetting that character is brains no less than cleverness, with which backhander at you all I will say 'Good-night.'"

CHAPTER XX

HUGH SUMNER INTERFERES

"I DETEST this new school of women, who are not fetched by courage," said Hugh Sumner to Ida one day. "Not long ago a little lady simpered to me that for her manliness meant bruteliness."

Hugh was sitting by the window in Ida's boudoir, his arm in a sling. He had but lately returned from Eastmere Abbey, to be wept over by his mother and made much of. His brother, to avoid a like fate, had betaken himself with his fishing tackle to Scotland.

Ida glanced up from her work. "Courage earns such poor wages nowadays," she said; "why should we women cultivate admiration for an obsolete virtue?"

"Why?" Hugh cried; "to keep it from being obsolete, of course. Once the coward of the family was thrust out of mischief into a monastery. Now he marries and floods the world with his progeny. Woman's admiration for courage is our only check upon him. You are not of the new school, Ida? You admire courage?"

"Yes, as I admire your moustachios; platonically, because my grandmothers fancied such things, I suppose. Ah, when you have had more experience, Hugh, you will find that woman is a very practical creature. Her heart is alive to the main chance and does not give in before mere ornament. When there were no paid armies or policemen, the armed knight was naturally her fancy. Now she prefers virtues that are less showy but more paying. Your modern Venus clings to her Vulcan, for is not Mars in his pay? Ours is the practical sex, Hugh."

"You make yourselves out worse than you are," cried young Sumner. "It is only a tendency I was deploring. I have no fear for our generation. Strip Eric Armstrong of his title and estates, and still I would back him to beat the whole Stock Exchange with ninety out of every hundred women! He is my type of manliness."

"I am not sure I should advise my best friend to succumb to his charms," said Ida.

"Well, I can't understand any girl succumbing to the charms of Ambrose Trevor." Hugh shot the retort out defiantly and planted himself mentally to receive the return volley. It failed to come. Ida made a deliberate stitch, and said blandly, "You must not expect to understand everything, Hugh. What opportunities have you had of knowing Mr. Trevor?"

Hugh had lamely to confess the meagreness of his acquaintance with the artist.

"I thought your science taught you not to build on ignorance," observed Ida, with her eyes still on her work. "But I am not sure that knowing him would help you much. I have heard it said that few men are at their best with men. You, now—are not you surprised sometimes at your brilliancy with your little ladies?"

"I have always put it down to the champagne," laughed Hugh.

"Materialist!" Ida exclaimed. "Yet I wish it were possible for you to know Mr. Trevor as I know him; it would be a liberal education for you, dear boy. What is your aim in life? To have a door-plate, I suppose, to publish a little book, a veiled advertisement, on gout, or massage, or some subject that the wheel of fashion may bring uppermost, to make some discovery that will get you talked and written about. And then, when your waiting-room and your visiting list are full, you will have reached the acme of your ambition. The men who turn their backs on success of that sort are fools in your esteem; you can't understand them. Ambrose Trevor is one of them."

Hugh laughed derisively. "He can afford it. I bet you wouldn't stargaze with him on three hundred a year, Miss Practical."

"Pray do not make me the subject of your speculations," said Ida quietly.

"Why, you made me the subject of yours just now,"

Hugh retorted. "But never mind; I am quite content to sing small beside Signor Ambrose, even though I have to take his high chest notes on trust."

"There are many things that have to be taken on trust in this world," Ida observed. "The Professor says that some insects have a cry so shrill that only a few sensitive ears can hear it. We others have to take it on trust. Sixty years ago we others would have had to take Shelley, Turner, or Beethoven on trust, though now their music is amongst the undertones in every educated brain. Mr. Trevor may be a great artist or he may not. You would call it presumption on my part to decide it either way. Personally I believe he is, and that twenty or forty years hence the world will have learnt to admit it. But I don't wish to force my opinion on you. I know that he works in the spirit of the great artists, and that for me places him high above the boys scrambling for coppers who form the greater part of one's world."

"Including me?" asked Hugh.

Ida nodded and smiled. She had been addressing her own doubts rather than Hugh's, and the smile was a smile of irony at suddenly realising her inconsistency in dropping into the sort of pleading for Trevor which on Eva's lips had once so excited her derision.

"Well, Ida, I wish you joy of him," Hugh continued. "After all, he may not be so 'gey ill to live with' as

some of these sports of Nature. But if I were a girl I would much sooner marry a frank, brave, open-hearted fellow who has knocked about the world, like Eric Armstrong, than a flighty dreamer. I like a man who says what comes to hand, picks from the top of the heap, instead of digging in the rubbish for something that no one has said before. I like a man to act on instinct instead of prodding his brain for subtleties. By Jove, if I were a girl I should be proud to win a heart like Eric's. I shall never forget his look when he said, 'Dear Ida, I shall love her till I die.'

Ida bent her head on her work, feeling the tears near her eyes. "Poor Eric!" she murmured to herself. Hugh watched her for a few seconds and then took himself off, whistling in a tone which expressed his uncertainty as to the result of his somewhat coarse diplomacy.

A day or two later Armstrong, coming home to his rooms in Jermyn Street, found Hugh Sumner waiting for him. The young doctor was seated at the writing-table intently studying an equation, scored in bold letters across a stray sheet of note-paper. Thus the hieroglyphic ran—

$$T i + A + e = A i + T e.$$

"Mathematics?" asked Eric.

"A problem in psychical affinities," Hugh answered with affected pomposity.

"Ah," said Eric carelessly, "I have no interest in such things."

"But, by Jove, you have," cried Hugh. "Come, sit down, and compose yourself for a lecture."

Eric submissively dropped on to the sofa.

"The world, you must know," Hugh began, "the earth, the air, the sea, and all that lives therein, is made up of elements, male and female, whose passion for each other keeps the whole big caldron a-simmer. There is that young buck, Oxygen, for instance, a very Don Juan for amours. He is here, there, and everywhere, and no sooner does he spy a charming damsel just out, or a lady but loosely attached to her lawful husband, than, piff! paff! he has hold of her, and never shall she escape from his clutches, except by a catastrophe. The union springs from a passion beside which our warmest preferences are as ice; but whether it occurs amidst thundering salvoes and leaping bonfires, or with the silence of a Quaker's wedding, we chemists have only one sign for it. Strange, isn't it, that a pair of dashes thus = should denote alike the explosion that wrecks a palace and the quiet changes at work beneath the rise and fall of a sleeping maiden's bosom?"

Eric crossed and uncrossed his legs and fidgeted with his cigarette case.

"I bore you, do I?" Hugh continued imperturbably. "I was in hopes the infant M.P. would value my object-

lesson. Come, you ought to know something of science, Eric. I can't have you lost amongst the ignorant party. Give me one minute longer. Stay, where was I?"

"Gloating over some sleeping beauty, were you not?"

"Ha! Well, we know that certain elements have mutual leanings, and would clasp each other to the heart, if they could. But often there are unfortunate entanglements elsewhere, or we cannot bring them near enough together. I assure you we sometimes find it as difficult to complete our matches as the head of a marriage bureau. Observe my equation; it looks simple enough, eh? And yet I almost despair of reaching the Q. E. F. Does the romance of chemistry begin to dawn on you? Here we have only four elements, two of each sex. Imagine 'T' to be a gentleman of culture with affinities for both the young ladies. At present he is attached to 'i,' and if we don't interfere they will soon be joined in wedlock. And then 'A,' a bold young spark who loves 'i,' but cares not a stiver for 'e,' and 'e,' who doats on 'T,' but has no leanings to 'A,' will both be left out in the cold. You see the necessity for interference? Complete my equation and all four are mated. We have got to the end of the third volume and can write 'finis.'"

Eric looked blankly at the paper and gave audible vent to his impatience.

"You dear old stupid!" Hugh burst out. "What a

matter-of-fact assortment of convolutions you have! Why! can't you see? The bold spark 'A' is no other than a dashing young officer who has beaten his sword into a pruning-hook for cutting down the exuberance of his parliamentary utterances. By all that's holy, what an explosion we shall have over our Q. E. F.!"

For a second Eric still looked blankly at the symbols. Then he coloured and frowned; but at the sight of Hugh's broad, frolicsome smile, his face cleared and the words that were rising to his lips halted and fell back.

The two men looked at each other for a moment in silence. Then Eric said, "It is very good of you, Hugh, to interest yourself in my affairs, but they must take their course. I know I should have made Miss Bannatyne a better husband than any one else in the world, but I cannot let her be influenced from outside. I trust her judgment implicitly. If I did not, how could I love her as I do?"

"You are a dear, quaint fellow, Eric," observed Hugh. "But, remember, the more you make me think of you, the less I must think of Ida. Why on earth couldn't she have been sensible? Here are you, a disconsolate bachelor, signing the pledge against all womankind; there's my poor little Eva playing the nun indifferently; there's Trevor pirouetting to an empty house; and Ida cricking her neck in the vain attempt to keep sight of

Trevor's balloons. And all these cross purposes because on one eventful day the leading lady happened to be bilious. O bile, bile, you little know the mischief you have done !”

Hugh took up his hat and moved towards the door. “It's my firm belief,” he said, “that Miss Bannatyne is getting weary of her Raffaele. How I should love to put a spoke in his wheel !”

Eric came up to him and took him by the arm. “Promise me, Hugh, you will try on nothing of that sort,” he said.

“What is the use of forswearing the impossible ?” asked Hugh.

“Ida must have a free hand ; on that I insist,” exclaimed Eric.

Hugh had his fingers on the door-handle. “You won't mind my giving your wheel a fillip, if I can ?” he said. Eric shook his head moodily, and as soon as his friend had gone threw himself into an arm-chair and stared despairingly at his boots.

Hugh's opportunity came sooner than he had expected. At the last of Mrs. Bland's receptions that season John Sumner suddenly descended, out of the blue as usual, with a small friend at his elbow, whom he introduced as Mr. Noel Amos, the celebrated thought-reader. The two men had met and made acquaintance beside a Scottish stream, where Mr. Amos was recruit-

ing his forces after an arduous season spent in providing distinguished personages with quasi-intellectual entertainment. The brilliancy of his success in other waters, however, had spoilt him for the gentle art, and he was quickly becoming disgusted with the want of reasonable alacrity on the part of the fish in rising to his fly, when he came across John Sumner. Together they passed a vote of want of confidence in Scottish salmon and Scottish streams, and Mr. Amos, having received a pressing call from a favourite duchess, easily persuaded his friend to return with him to town, and was in turn persuaded to give the assemblage in Savile Row a taste of his quality.

He was due in Belgravia on the stroke of ten, and was obliged to rush through his *répertoire*, but his feats lost nothing in impressiveness from the rapidity with which they succeeded each other. Rarely had Mrs. Bland's guests spent such an exhilarating evening. The sight of the little man panting and quivering with excitement, his neat features working and his black curls streaming out beneath his snowy bandage, as he dragged Sumner's unwieldy bulk round the room in search of a hidden pin, surprised even the solemn-visaged into smiles.

"Steam-tug and galleon," murmured Stanley Hood.

Dr. Bland waved a white hand in the direction of his floundering stepson, and suggested "The Conservative party."

Hood resented the comparison. "More like your pet democracy," he retorted. "There's no thought-reader to compare with your demagogue. He gives out grandly that he is leading, and all the while he is intent on indications, probing for the line of least resistance, like Mr. Amos."

"Would you prefer to see him butting a brick wall?" asked Dr. Bland.

The pin was duly hunted to earth and, amidst the plaudits that greeted this crowning proof of his prowess, the little man, with a jewelled hand upon his shirt-front, bowed himself out of the room.

Then criticism broke loose. The sceptical explained the phenomena, one and all, on familiar principles; the credulous saw in them the workings of an unsuspected force, and were sore with Mr. Amos for his laughing disclaimer of wizardry; while the indolent demanded more facts before they could hopefully face the difficult task of making up their minds on the subject.

The Professor constituted himself the fugleman of the rationalists. "It is just a case of horse and rider," he said, "only here the rider is unaware of his pull upon the rein. Unconscious movements are none the less accurate for being unconscious. Often they are more to the purpose than our most purposive ones. What is more accurate than habit? As the dinner-hour comes round, I invariably find myself on the steps of my club."

"Why, strange to say, so do I," said Stanley Hood.

"You!" cried the Professor disdainfully; "I'll wager I am more punctual than you, in spite of your chronometer."

"We can't all boast of an alarum inside us," laughed Hood.

"Why, I don't know that lazy people need reminding of meal-time any more than a cow in a field. What else have you to think about?" and the Professor turned on his heel to make his adieux.

Very little had been seen of Hugh Sumner during the evening. He had retired immediately after Mr. Amos, his eyes aglow with a happy thought, and had closeted himself in his little sanctum until he heard the guests departing. Then, after bowing out the last of them, he came bounding upstairs to the drawing-room, where he found his brother and Trevor discussing the thought-reader's feats across Miss Bannatyne's chair.

"Any one can do it," he interpolated airily, "with no more stock-in-trade than quick nerves and mother-wit."

Trevor demurred to the statement.

"Try it yourself," Hugh suggested, "or if you doubt your powers, let John read your thoughts."

The friends agreed to make the trial, and Hugh sat down by Ida. He had just time to say to her, "Poor Eric is ill in bed. I have just asked Dr. Bland to go

and see him," when Sumner came in with his eyes bandaged. He took Trevor's hand and held it against his forehead, and in a few seconds they were standing over Ida, and Sumner had touched a jewelled spray in her hair. Hugh greeted the movement with a hiss, and then Trevor coloured and stammeringly explained that the fault was his. He had forgotten the uninteresting pin in the bookcase, and all the while his thoughts had focussed themselves on that word "Together" glittering in brilliants upon his lady's head.

"You are no good," said Sumner with playful scorn. "It's absurd trying to read the thoughts of a genius. They are crabbed enough when he writes them out in black and white."

"Our turn now, Ida," cried Hugh. "You shall read my thoughts. I am no genius, you tell me often enough."

Miss Bannatyne laughed and sailed out of the room. The moment she was gone Hugh drew a photograph from his pocket and hid it in a cabinet drawer. Then he went to call her back. She came in bandaged, took Hugh's hand and walked without a moment's hesitation to the cabinet, pulled open the drawer, and drew out the photograph, to the amazement of them all.

"Well, this beats witchcraft," cried Hugh. "Perhaps now you can tell whose photograph it is."

Ida reflected a moment and shook her head.

"A dear old friend of yours," said Hugh; "open your eyes."

Ida slipped the handkerchief from her face and looked. On the instant she turned deathly pale and clutched hold of the cabinet, making its serried array of china rattle again.

"Cruel boy!" she cried.

"Why, what is it, dear?" asked Trevor, stepping anxiously forward and taking the photograph from her. "Are you ill?"

"No," she gasped, with her hand upon her throat, "only startled."

Trevor looked at the photograph and saw the likeness of a handsome youth, in the fashion of a few years back, with an indescribable look of death upon his face. Scrutinising it more closely, he found that the outlines of the bones had been faintly shaded in, giving the face the look of one in the last hopeless stage of a lingering illness. He turned to the back of the photograph and read "Eric," written in Ida's large unmistakable handwriting. He looked round indignantly for Hugh, but the young gentleman had prudently vanished, chuckling to himself over the success of his stratagem.

"What a ghastly trick to play on you!" said Trevor, stroking her hand.

It had cost Ida a strenuous effort to force down the

threats of hysteria, but she now answered composedly, "It is a photograph I have had for years of a very old friend. Eric Armstrong; you have heard of him?"

"Hugh has been tampering with it."

"Ah!" she shuddered, "I thought for a moment I saw him dying."

As Trevor walked home that evening the flood of happiness, which had borne him buoyantly along ever since his engagement, for the first time went near running dry. The sight of Ida blanched and faltering had shaken his confidence in his reading of her character. She was always frankly gracious to him, but calm, composed, and passionless; and he had taught himself to believe that she was one of those women—not rare in England—who have little capacity for the tender emotion. He loved her devotedly as a beautiful, intelligent, high-minded woman, whose actions were guided more by principle than feeling,—the very mate for him. He believed he could make her happy even though the love, in the romantic sense of the word, should be all on his side. In unions where it is the wife who offers the cheek, coldness on her part is more or less a surety for happiness. Give her appetite for love, and that happiness is amongst quicksands, unless her husband can make himself the object of her passion. When Trevor saw Ida's emotion over the photograph, he thought he had come upon the traces of an old,

burnt-out passion, for he instantly dismissed the suspicion that his promised wife could still be in love with some one else. But the fact that she could have loved even in early girlhood was to him a sufficiently perturbing revelation, and he began at once to distrust his own power of making her happy. For what amount of self-esteem can be confident of meeting the caprices of passion? Then he went on to torture himself as to his own motives. Was his devotion to Ida a pure one? had she the best of his heart? or did he only prize his love for her as a ladder to artistic inspiration? Pondering on this problem, he was forced to admit that love had not given him that quickening of insight which he had expected of it. The days passed by and no beatific visions came to him. He seemed to have sunk to a lower plane, and in his delight in dwelling on Ida's beauty, and soothing himself with the music of her voice, to have lost the quick sensibilities and the flashing thoughts which heretofore had seemed to sanctify his life. No, the happiness of love had failed to set the "imprisoned splendour" free. "Is it sorrow only that can do it?" he sighed, as he turned his latch-key in the door and passed into the darkness of his studio.

CHAPTER XXI

A QUARREL WITH THE QUIXOTIC

FOR a fortnight past some ten small paintings by Trevor had been on view at a private gallery in Bond Street. Ida, delighted to see her dream fulfilled, begged her lover to complete his great picture of "Paris" and add it to the show. But nothing would induce Trevor "to parade her loveliness before a gaping world," and the painting, still unfinished, was left upon his easel. Nor could he be persuaded to include his study of Eva Sumner in the collection. He exhibited under an assumed name, and stubbornly refused to furnish the curious with clues to his identity. The work of the new artist encountered a frigid welcome from the public. Ida was at the gallery almost daily, only to gather, as the fruit of her pains, a poor sheaf of random arrows shot far wide of the mark by careless or unpractised critics. The harvest of her scissors put her in no better heart. She was able to show her lover a column of cuttings, neatly ranged heel to toe down the snowy

pages of a gilt-edged notebook. But inspection pronounced them little worthy of such a parade-ground. Whether armed with praise or blame they were set up and sent into the world with equal slovenliness, mere formal paragraphs, written to fill a corner and earn the price of a mutton chop. Only the *Pilot*, a weekly journal which plumes itself on its quick eye for coming talent, and is unhappy if it does not crown a new genius every month, found the exhibition worthy of serious notice. Ida felt much chagrin at the small stir made by the pictures in the world of art, but to Trevor the neglect of the public and the press was much more tolerable than the laboured interpretations of the infallible weekly, which insisted on discovering between the lines of his work a whole fauna of ideas that certainly could never have flourished in the painter's mental climate.

Ida was still in doubt within herself whether to launch her disgust upon the public for not appreciating Trevor's talents, or upon herself for having taken them at his valuation ; and Trevor, having slighted his own feelings in vain in the attempt to satisfy Ida, was searching for a decent pretext to withdraw his pictures, when suddenly they became the rage. The gallery was now packed full late into the afternoon, and Mr. Ephraim, the suavely purring Jew who presided over it, was nearly heartbroken by the number of eager bids which

he had to wave aside with the irrational formula "not for sale." The connoisseurs knitted solemn brows over the style and *technique* of the new painter, and the journals made up for their previous neglect by eagerly discussing his identity, until Ida took it upon herself to cut short their surmises by a private hint.

Our hero did not accept his blushing honours with a good grace. He almost cursed the morning when he awoke to find himself famous, his name and history blazoned forth in every print. But further tribulation was in store for him. One afternoon, while the new wonder was still in its nine days, he was met by two acquaintances and pinned in a street corner with their congratulations. Their manner to him was unwontedly familiar; he credited them with having lunched too freely and deliberately stiffened himself.

"Never again ask me to trust a man who lies low," cried one of them. "He is sure to be hatching some high-flying scheme or other."

"On my word, Trevor," the other broke in, "it was a stroke of genius. So simple too. Why couldn't one have hit on it one's self?"

Trevor looked from the one to the other in bewilderment.

"Really, gentlemen," he stammered.

The friends encountered his gaze with irritating chuckles.

"Sublime!" exclaimed one. "But he won't take us in again, eh? We have his measure now."

Trevor emptied his chest upon an angry ejaculation, and tried to break away, but his feet refused to carry him.

"You will be telling us next that you never saw the *Byleaf's* rhapsody 'On Faithfulness in Art.'"

"Why, I wrote it myself," Trevor cried.

"Well, that's cool," was the rejoinder. "Here's a man brings to birth an ingenuous young journal, gives out that it is to be a pattern of purity, and won't even print an advertisement on its pelisse; and then, when the youngster has learnt to take us all in with its innocent face, he sends it out into the streets to bawl an advertisement of himself. After all, you are no better than the run of us, Mr. Puffster."

Trevor burst away from them and rushed homewards half demented, the word "puffster" dinning in his ears. As he grew cooler he forced his memory back to the incriminated essay. Three years had passed since he wrote it, but he could recollect nothing in it which the strictest purist could condemn. It had lain in his desk until a month ago, when he had sent it unread to Hood, to still his cries for copy. He well remembered writing it. It was at Bruges one summer evening with the setting sun streaming over the wide Flemish plain and across the sleepy canal into his low-ceiled lodging. He

was fresh then from the study of Memling and the Van Eycks, and was burning to see modern art clothing itself in their patient faithfulness. But he had certainly never intended to arrogate to himself the quality which he missed in his contemporaries.

The whole incident seemed to him a nightmare, too hideous for truth, until he reached his rooms and tore the wrapper from the offending paper. Once no number of the *Byleaf* had gone to press without his initials on the proof, but his engagement had sapped his interest in the venture; it had fallen more and more under Hood's control, and the numbers now often lay unopened for days on his writing-table. He ran his eye breathlessly down the fatal page, and was almost congratulating himself on being the victim of a vulgar hoax, when he caught sight of the last paragraph. Thus the cruel sentence ran :—

“Fully to realise how little of this quality (*i.e.* faithfulness) there is in modern art, and yet at the same time how vividly the need for it has impressed itself on some of our younger painters, one has only to compare the mercenary productions that cover the walls of the official galleries with the series of small but exquisite pictures by an unknown artist now on view at Mr. Ephraim's rooms in New Bond Street.”

Trevor's heart stopped dead when he read this audacious interpolation. Recovering himself, he ripped the

paper into fragments, and stamped them under his feet, as if thereby he would annihilate the villany and all its issues. Then he seized his hat and dashed off in a hansom to the office of the *Byleaf*.

Meanwhile the chief culprit, Hood, had been waiting day after day in terrified anticipation of Trevor's visit. The full significance of his deed was not borne in upon him until he read with horror that the anonymous painter was no other than his friend and patron, Ambrose Trevor. Before that he had not the faintest inkling that the pictures he had been bribed to praise came from the Chelsea studio. He had never seen any of Trevor's work, and he had repeatedly heard the artist express his emphatic resolve never to exhibit. There was that much excuse for him. Circumstances too had conspired to hurry him into the commission of an act which was no sooner beyond recall than he burned to recall it. For a long time Trevor alone had kept the *Byleaf* afloat. But when on his engagement he began to feel the need for money, he had hunted out his deed of partnership and insisted on Hood's bearing the expenses of the journal, until his liability was exhausted. Hood in return had bargained for a freer hand, and for Hood a freer hand meant of necessity a more lavish one. His small savings were exhausted sooner than his liability, and he was driven to borrow. His first application was to Mr. Ephraim, whose artistic dealings

were merely the ornamental trimming to a laborious life spent in befriending the needy. The little Jew was not unwilling to lend, but to enhance the favour complained bitterly of the hardness of the times, the expenses of his summer show, and the unfortunate holding-off of the expected shower of shillings. Hood prescribed his one panacea, "Advertise."

"In the *Byleaf*?" Mr. Ephraim suggested.

Hood shook his head, but the tempter was not to be discouraged. "Come, you expect me to oblige you. Reciprocity is my motto. Surely it would be easy enough to slip a slight allusion to my gallery into one of your articles. It isn't much to ask. The pictures are good. You can praise them honestly. The *Pilot* raves about them," and Mr. Ephraim brought out a ragged cutting from his pocket-book and held some underlined sentences before Hood's eyes. "Come and see them yourself."

Hood saw the pictures, and easily persuaded himself that they would bear praising.

"Look here," said the Jew, fingering Hood's sleeve; "do what I ask, and I will buy 100,000 copies and post them myself."

The offer was tempting. Hood rapidly calculated that he would clear £200 by the transaction and so escape the need of borrowing, while at the same time the *Byleaf* would be splendidly advertised. But he

could not close with Mr. Ephraim without Trevor's consent. He expected to meet him at Mrs. Harvey Bland's that evening,—it was the very evening made memorable by the astounding feats of Mr. Amos,—and he went thither prepared to abide by Trevor's decision.

He had not been in the room five minutes, however, before he was addressed by Miss Bannatyne. She made him sit down with her in a quiet corner and began to ply him with questions about the *Byleaf*, in which she feared that Trevor was sinking too much of his money. Hood's answers made her look grave, and her face did not brighten until he chanced to mention the offer he had received from Mr. Ephraim and asked her to induce Trevor to accept it. She took it up eagerly and bore down all his scruples. She saw in it what Hood did not—a means of rousing the sluggish public to an interest in her lover's pictures. She regretted that the opportunity of forcing him into notice had come just then, before he had grown used to her influence; but the juncture was a critical one, for Trevor would be sure to seize on the neglect of the present exhibition as an excuse for declining all further appeals for recognition. As to his scruples about wooing publicity, Miss Bannatyne quietly ruled them out of court as a sentimental weakness which ought not for a moment to stand in the way of his advancement and profit. Of course he must know nothing of Hood's proposal. To consult him

would be to ensure its rejection. If it were carried out, however, without his cognisance—well, there was no knowing what mad things he might not do when he found it out,—he would probably stop the *Byleaf*, tear down his pictures from the gallery walls, and perhaps insist on burying himself and her in the depths of the country ; but then her object would have been gained, curiosity would have been excited about his pictures and a market established for them, which in time he might be persuaded to supply.

“Why trouble Mr. Trevor about it?” she said to Hood. “These business worries distract him from his work. In a trifling matter like this you may surely act on your own responsibility.”

Hood promised to see Mr. Ephraim that very evening, and warned her to look in the morrow’s *Byleaf* for the result of his negotiations. On the stairs he met Trevor in company with Sumner and the thought-reader. He quickly assured himself that the artist had no thought of visiting the office that evening, and went off congratulating himself that the display of Mr. Amos’s powers had not yet advanced beyond the stage of a drawing-room entertainment.

The deed was done, and then for the best part of a fortnight Hood waited in an agony of suspense, expecting the storm. At length it burst. Trevor’s wrath was beyond his utmost imagination. It scathed and

shrivelled him. He hardly knew what he said in answer, and in a moment it was out that Miss Bannatyne had approved the bargain with the picture-dealer.

"You lie," Trevor shouted.

"No, upon my oath, though I never meant to tell you."

"Of course not; it did not occur to you that you could ever be mean enough to screen yourself behind a petticoat."

"What on earth is the use of making so much of it, Trevor?" Hood pleaded. "I have told you I never knew your pictures were in the gallery. How could I know they were yours? It is simply an unlucky accident, unless——"

"Unless what?" asked Trevor.

"Unless Miss Bannatyne knew."

"She did not know," said Trevor huskily. The lie almost choked him, but Ida's reputation was dearer to him even than his own self-respect.

"Well, then, it is simply a coincidence, and we can shake hands upon it," said Hood, brightening.

"First get the world to believe it a coincidence," cried Trevor. "No, Hood, we can never be friends again. How can you ask me to trust you any more? Take the *Byleaf* and make what you can of it. Do not ask me to look at the infernal sheet again."

Trevor never spoke to Ida about her share in the

business, and she believed that Hood had kept her secret. She of course was careful to avoid the subject, and it was only from the newspapers that she learnt in common with every one else that Mr. Ambrose Trevor had removed his pictures from the Bond Street gallery, and had severed his connection with the *Byleaf*. The announcement, coming from one who hated public mention so cordially as Trevor, was a sufficient revelation to her of his suffering. For a day she was remorseful at having fallen away from the loyal path she had resolved to tread, but this feeling was soon swallowed up in an indignant rebellion against the tether of quixotic prejudice which threatened effectually to hinder every effort of hers to draw her lover out of his obscurity into the golden sunshine of fame.

CHAPTER XXII

HUGH SUMNER'S REVENGE

A TRIO of Dr. Bland's whist friends, including Stanley Hood, had been dining in Savile Row, and after the ladies had retired the talk fell upon instinct. Dr. Bland compared it to an anæsthetic.

"It acts just like a dose of chloroform," he said; "deadens your higher centres, your timid nerve-aristocracy, and allows your lower layers free fling. Under its working, reason, conscience, imagination, fall asleep and surrender the field to automatisms. Here's Hugh now tells me he wants to settle down. The fact is, his free-swimming days are over, and he is feeling the stress of the instinct to glue himself somewhere, which he inherits from his ancestors, the Sea-squirts."

The guests smiled and glanced at Hugh, who laughed uneasily.

"Don't blush, man," cried Dr. Bland. "What better ancestor could you, or I, or any doctor desire than an Ascidian? *Askos*, a bottle, is it not?"

"A wineskin, I think, sir," said Hugh drily.

Dr. Bland sent a smile round the table to express his appreciation of the young man's quickness, and gaily passed on the decanters. "Well," he said, "here you are, Hugh, longing for settled life. So you throw yourself carelessly on to the first current that comes. As in a dream, your critical faculty is dethroned. You are blind to the terrible responsibility of choice, and seem not to care a rush whether the current in question is "the" tide which will bear you on to fame and fortune, or only a stupid little eddy that will leave you high and dry upon the sand. No, your imagination is anæsthetised, and does not whisper that there may be choicer currents ahead than this which is bearing you off to Birmingham."

"Sheffield," interposed Hugh, by way of correction.

"Ah, it's all one," said Dr. Bland. "It has not occurred to him, gentlemen, that there are pleasanter places to plant one's self for life in than Sheffield or Birmingham. Of course not; he is in a state of narcosis."

"Do you want to bring me to?" asked Hugh.

"Not for worlds, dear boy," cried Dr. Bland. "I hold a brief for instinct. I say with Emerson, base yourself on your instincts, and your instincts will pull you through. Ask the gray-haired free-swimmer who has always said 'nay' to the instinct to settle, and

never found a current or resting-place good enough for him, whether a whole life on the ocean wave is as joyous and worthy of desire as it sometimes seems to us poor chained Ascidians. And then when we get his answer, let us be thankful for the instinct which drugged our fears while it bore us on to the safe cloister of settled life."

Hugh Sumner rose to his feet with a wink in the direction of Stanley Hood. "Your health, my Lord Abbot!" he cried, and led off the toast.

"Thank you, my friends," said Dr. Bland, beaming through his glasses and resolutely pushing the decanters away from him. "You see I do my best to give effect to your kind wishes. How sad that one cannot drink one's friends' healths without imperilling one's own!"

The current which bade fair to land Hugh Sumner at Sheffield came to him in the shape of a letter from an old friend of his father's, a man of light and leading in that abode of gloom, who proffered his influence towards obtaining for Hugh an appointment at one of the local hospitals,—a sure stepping-stone, he added, to practice in the town. Hugh, sick of inaction and with a mended arm calling out for exercise, jumped at the offer, and proceeded at once to collect from his late teachers those receipts for fees paid known as testimonials. Therein he learnt for the first time that "by dint of uniform diligence and decorous conduct he had

won the esteem of every one with whom he had been brought in contact"; that he was "a gentleman of culture and refinement, distinguished for tact and sympathy, no less than for industry and ability"; that "he had neglected no opportunity of mastering the processes of disease and the methods of cure"; that "he was as expert in inference as in action"; and finally, as the practical conclusion towards which all these encomiums tended, that "any institution might deem itself fortunate which should succeed in securing his services."

With sundry grimaces expressive of his keen appreciation of the humour of the situation, Hugh made a fair copy of these flattering notices and despatched it to the printers in Soho. He was conscious of falling laughably short of the pattern portrait presented therein, but he was softened by the praise to the extent of wishing he were somewhat less unworthy of it. To himself he confessed to a certain wanton impishness, which had often sent him rough-shod over the corns of others in the pursuit of ludicrous situations and the applause of his circle. As he sauntered to the printers to correct his proof he felt that his twenty-three years and the near prospect of figuring in a responsible post claimed from him the turning over of a new leaf, and he clenched hands over the resolve that there should be an end of his practical jokes. Henceforward he would turn a stubborn back on temptation.

He scaled the creaking stairs of the printing-office, and, threading his way through the stacks of paper that stood waiting the meal-time of the panting monster of the iron jaws downstairs, soon found himself in the little closet where in the early days of the *Byleaf* he had spent many an odd five minutes, while waiting for his brother, in chatting with its occupant the reader. Mr. Bowley was away at dinner and not a single workman was in sight. Hugh perched himself on the reader's empty stool and looked around for his proof. Clearly it was still in hand, and he had to stifle his eagerness to see how his praises demeaned themselves in print.

On the desk before him lay a long slip of names and addresses in process of correction. Hugh had once had whispered to him the mysterious purport of this list, and he glanced carelessly down it till his eye was arrested by a name he knew. "Smith, Robert, St. Paul's Hospital."

"Poor Bob!" he exclaimed, "so those wretched tradesmen have got you on their black list. That comes of dressing above your station. It's the scorn of a frayed coat that has ruined you, Bob. Well, you're in tip-top company here, if that's any comfort to you; cheek by jowl with an Irish lord, a British baronet, a colonel the honourable, a brace of reverends, and gallant captains galore. 'Faith, Bob, I don't like your mixing with these gentry. They will besmirch your sweet simplicity.

.Come out from amongst them, Bob, back to solvent humdrum." With which admonition Hugh ran a pen through his friend's name and copied the reader's "dele" in the margin. "There, Bob, your baptism of ink."

Then a wicked thought zigzagged across his brain, making his eyes dance and his fingers clutch the pen convulsively. Any one watching his face would have been aware of the signs of a sharp struggle between the powers of good and evil. For a minute the issue was in the balance, and then the spirit of malice and revenge conquered, and with huzzas and flying colours swept away the little rampart of good resolve that Hugh had so lately built up in his defence. He took up his pen and, deftly copying Mr. Bowley's hand, inserted in its proper place in the straggling line of corrections the name of "Trevor, Mr. Ambrose, Chelsea Studios." Then he stealthily wiped the pen and passed out of the office unnoticed, muttering to himself, "What a hundred thousand pities one must keep it dark!"

That same afternoon Ida was complaining to Mrs. Doncaster of the many hot pilgrimages through West-end streets it had cost her and Trevor to find a house that just suited them. "And now there's the furnishing," she sighed.

"Be thankful for it, my dear," said her aunt. "You young lovers don't know how much you owe to these practical demands on you. You get engaged and want

to marry in a hurry. But there is a nest to build, and you grumble because you have to tramp up and down Wardour Street instead of philandering in a meadow. Why, it's the very best thing that can happen to you—a dispensation of Providence to hide the hideous fact that you can weary each other."

Ida attempted a protest.

"Oh, of course, you and Mr. Trevor are not everyday lovers," her aunt continued. "You have brains both of you, and no doubt plenty to chatter about. But I have known young couples who did not care a pin for each other keeping up the ruse splendidly across a rampart of coal-boxes and dish-covers. There is double danger to lovers in being too intimate. What country is there where engagements are so long and for the most part so faithfully kept in every way as in England? It is all due to our cult of the home, and its priesthood, the upholsterers. Oh, I give them the greatest credit. I have watched them with intense admiration, I assure you. Their tact and tender patience with the innocent young worshippers are beyond all praise. You question their services, my dear? Why, look at the results in a thousand homes, full of love and contentment, all rejoicing in the same faith, the same ritual, and, in one word, the same furniture. If uniformity of worship is any testimony to the influence of a priesthood, why Tottenham Court Road beats the churches hollow."

Ida smiled at her aunt's persiflage, and declared that she and her lover laid no claim to orthodoxy. "We take the liberty of thinking for ourselves," she said.

"Ah, that's Mr. Trevor," returned her aunt. "Your artist is always a freethinker."

"Is it a crime to exercise private judgment on the pattern of one's chairs?" asked Ida.

"Is it a crime, my dear, to throw money away on fads?"

"Not if you can afford it," Ida answered, "or else Mr. Trevor is a criminal of the first order. Everything is to be made to his own designs. And yet he will not hear of running into debt. The coat, I fear, will suffer from his nice measurement of cloth. The drawing-room will be a barrack."

"Ah! if you will live in Wilton Place," said Mrs. Doncaster, who would have been better pleased to see her niece settling in a less distinguished neighbourhood.

"It is not my doing," Ida apologised.

"Well, my dear, I hope you will be happy wherever you live," replied her aunt, sinking back on the sofa with a movement that warned Ida that her interest in the subject was exhausted.

The equipment of the house in Wilton Place had scarcely advanced beyond the stage of discussion. As yet Trevor had only given a few commissions for the bulkier furniture, but ere a week had passed he was

perplexed one morning by receiving letters from three separate firms demanding a deposit of thirty per cent as a condition of proceeding with his orders. He sent off the cheques at once, and found his balance depleted to such an extent that it would only just meet the decorator's claims. He consoled himself, however, with the reflection that his quarterly allowance from Sister Irene was on the point of falling due.

That afternoon he drove with Ida to a shop in Regent Street where he was well known. He was welcomed with deference and his orders were gratefully taken down. The shopman left him and went to his desk. Just then he saw a victoria drive up to the door, and there stepped from it a tall, fair man, whose face touched the spring of some vague painful memory, which Trevor could not then more exactly define. The new-comer entered, and a moment later was shaking hands with Ida.

"Glad to see you out again, Sir Eric," Trevor heard Ida say in the clear, crisp voice that had never yet failed to send a thrill through him.

The young baronet thanked her, and extolled her uncle for the skill which had set him on his legs again so expeditiously.

"You see I have been trained for other work than sitting up half the night in poisoned air listening to twaddle. Oh, I mean to go through with it," he went

on in answer to something in Ida's eyes. "I don't forget what took me there."

Then Ida called Trevor and introduced him to Eric, and the two men exchanged some courteous phrases about the hardship of being compelled to spend the hot July days in London shops. "I am forgetting the very smell of the country," Sir Eric complained.

Meanwhile the shopman was hovering on their skirts, and as soon as he caught Trevor's eye he came up and explained that the firm made it a rule not to undertake large commissions without a deposit.

"Nonsense!" Trevor burst out. "I have dealt here for years and never heard of such a rule."

The shopman began to dilate on the depression of trade, but Trevor cut him short with a demand to see his master.

Ida had turned her back upon them and was asking Eric whether he too found the modern tradesman so exacting.

"On the contrary," answered Eric, "they are all complaisance now. Why, I owe the price of a hunter here at this very moment. But I have made acquaintance with their other face, and a desperately ugly one it is. Till my father died I dared not be seen in half these streets. But in those days, don't you know, they had my name in the jilt-book."

Ida's face appealed for enlightenment.

"The jilt-book—oh, that's my name for the tradesman's black-list," Eric explained. "If you don't pay your bills the fellows pillory you there, and then good-bye to credit till you buy yourself out of it."

"But why jilt-book?"

"Oh, some of us were talking one day, and I suggested—for I was rather sore on the subject just then—that we young fellows should protect ourselves like the tradesmen, and keep a list of the fair customers who had got hold of our hearts without intending to pay for them. So in our set the tradesman's list got called the jilt-book. After all it was a thinnish sort of joke."

"And did you propose to exact a deposit on the value of your affection?"

"You mean it is not worth making that fuss over."

"No, Eric, I did not mean that," said Ida softly.

Trevor meanwhile nervously paced the shop, stopping now and again to smooth away his frown at the sound of Ida's voice, till the assistant came back and led him off to his master's office.

Eric watched them as they mounted the stairs, and asked Ida under his breath, "Surely he has not been qualifying for the black-list?"

Ida shook her head resolutely.

"Oh, one gets in by mistake sometimes," said Eric. "I wonder. I saw the man turning over a book as I came in;" and he threw an arm over the spindles of

the shopman's desk and fished up a small thin pamphlet covered in American cloth. Ida heard him give a low whistle of surprise, and the moment after he had shown her Trevor's name amongst the defaulters.

Just then they heard footsteps on the stairs. Eric hastily pocketed the book, and drew away from the desk. At the sight of her lover's name Ida had turned deathly pale, and her voice died in her throat.

Trevor came back with the cloud still on his face, attended by the master of the shop. Eric went up to him and took him aside.

"Excuse me one question, Mr. Trevor," he said; "you will see directly that I have good reasons for asking it. Have you many creditors?"

"Not one, on my honour," cried Trevor. He had flushed up at the question, but at a glance at Ida, who had wearily thrown herself into a chair, his resentment vanished. Eric, too, looked at her, and smiled encouragingly, as he strode up to the master shopman.

"I wish to know, sir," he said, "whether you have any special reason for treating my friend Mr. Trevor differently from your other customers?"

"We are very sorry to refuse credit to a friend of yours, Sir Eric," said the shopman blandly, "but we must abide by our rule."

"You have no knowledge of Mr. Trevor's business relations."

"None whatever, Sir Eric."

"You have not found his name on any list of defaulters?"

Trevor darted forward to interpose, but Eric stopped him with a quiet gesture.

"I know of no such list, Sir Eric," said the tradesman; "I wish I did."

Then Eric dived into his pocket, drew out the pamphlet in American cloth, and showed the name of Ambrose Trevor.

"I found it on yon desk," he explained.

Trevor's passion had by now got the better of him. His face was crimson, and the blue veins on his forehead stood out till Ida thought they must give way.

"This is infamous," he cried, seizing on the book and angrily tearing it across.

The master of the shop suavely disclaimed all knowledge of the pamphlet. "It belongs to my assistant, Sir Eric," he said. "He is responsible for the orders he takes, and really I cannot blame him for guarding his own pocket. You see I was quite justified," he added with an insolent smile.

Trevor went up to him. "You have been befooled," he cried. "My order, of course, is cancelled." Then he thanked Eric with a grip of his hand, hurried Ida to the brougham, and bade drive to the printers.

In Soho, where he had been known so long as the

paymaster of the *Byleaf*, Trevor met with obsequious help. The proof where his name first appeared was hunted out for him, and Mr. Bowley was sent for and savagely cross-examined, till the tears stood in the poor man's eyes; but every effort to explain the mystery proved fruitless, and to this day neither Trevor nor any one else, save a certain young surgeon who is rapidly making for himself a name at Sheffield, knows who was the perpetrator of the jest.

It was easy enough to undo some of its consequences. Abject apologies were circulated; tradesmen again became obsequious, and smacked lips over Trevor's orders. But elsewhere the incident had worked irreparable mischief. It had broken Ida's confidence in her lover. No subsequent explanations could erase from her mind the memory of that sickening moment when Eric had shown her the name of Ambrose Trevor side by side with those of hand-to-mouth adventurers and vulgar swindlers.

Her dreams showed her Trevor and herself knee-deep in quicksand, while above them loomed the hooded form of Irene, now stretching out an irresolute hand, now watching them sink with gray, passionless eyes. Her better impulses were swallowed up by her distrust. She felt that, however beautiful and noble her lover's scheme of life might be, she had not the strength to stand by him and second him through poverty and

obscurity. The figure of Eric stood before her, helpful, resolute, strong, because only grasping within its strength, a character she ought to have divined in the bud. She slackened her hold upon her heart and let it go out towards him, only to find her wretchedness increased. Meanwhile Trevor, watching her sadly, and feeling for her distress more than for his own, went on loving her all the more.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW IRENE KEPT HER PROMISE

FOR a month past the gloom had never left Irene's face. She moved serenely through her wards as usual, with grave eyes alert for the tracks of zeal or listlessness, and with lips that lightly held in leash praise, sarcasm, and reproof. But there was now none of the sunny cheeriness of voice and look that had once been as oil to the weary limbs of her staff. Only Eva Sumner of them all had skill to charm away the shadow from her face, and bring back to it a glimmering dawn of smile. Eva's was not a temperament to succeed in the service of the sick; the very intensity of her pity paralysed her usefulness. Life in the wards was to her as perpetual pruning to a fragile plant. No sooner had her sympathies twined themselves round some poor soul in need of kindness than death came, or recovery, leaving an empty bed. Irene watched her awake and sleeping, and when she saw her lips blanching and her temper shedding its sweetness, she suddenly called her

away from the wards to help her with her letters downstairs.

From that moment Eva grew into herself again. She had now a single steadfast goal for thoughtfulness and love, and the more she spent herself the stronger she became. She was able to lighten Irene's burden by a thousand silent services, watching and helping her with a tact that hid from Irene, who never would have borne an officious ministration, the extent and alertness of her care. The happiness gathered on Eva's face in proportion as the gloom on Irene's deepened. Eva could only guess at the troubles that were weighing down her dear mistress. She shared none of Irene's secrets, knew nothing of her greater difficulties, and could only wait in patience, warding off to the best of her skill the smaller worries that she knew of.

Irene's trouble was the common one—want of money. Driven as it was, her hobby was heading straight towards bankruptcy. In the first flush of success she had built a costly nurses' home, and buried thousands in bricks and mortar, which proved barren of return. The work of catering for the care of the sick, which in other hands has proved a steady source of income, was, under the reckless magnificence of Irene's rule, an undertaking that spelt ruin. The annual deficits became appalling, and Irene looked around in vain for help. Her early patrons were dead or estranged, and in her love of

unfettered power she had shrunk from seeking new ones. So she found herself left in isolation, the price of autocracy. She cried aloud for aid in the columns of the daily press, but her voice was drowned by more piteous and sensational appeals. Who would help a humdrum home concern, which ought to keep afloat of itself, when the victims of earthquake, pestilence, and famine were shrieking from the four quarters of the globe? For the purest charity has something to satisfy beyond the sufferer, and it may be questioned whether even the Good Samaritan would not have been tempted away from his wounded charge by the counter attraction of a collision of trains or a colliery disaster.

So Irene's cries brought her no relief from the burden of debt, and her thoughts began to fasten longingly on the £500 waiting for Ambrose at her banker's. In the old days he would have pressed the money upon her with a grateful smile, but now he had need of it himself. It was locked away from her, her only key to it her own dishonour.

As she paced her room her anger grew hot against the siren whose witchery had come between her nephew and herself. The air was stifling her, and she threw open the pane and looked out on to the squalidness below. In the court a haggard woman was coaxing home a drunken husband. "Bah!" cried Irene, as the woman's apron went up to her eyes, "what are their

troubles to mine?" She clutched the window-ledge, and with set lips tried to drive off the black thoughts that oppressed her, but in vain. Back they came in ever narrowing circles to settle upon her again. She sent back her mind to her blithe girlhood, when there was no weight of care upon her, when she had money to spend on trifles and luxuries for herself, and to scatter bountifully around her. Now the purchase of a pair of gloves was an action to be weighed. For a moment she yearned to fling off her responsibilities and fly away to breathe free air at her cottage by the Kentish coast. But the next minute she blazed up in anger and contempt of her weakness.

The door opened and she heard the rustle of garments.

"Oh, Eva," she groaned, "it is more than I can bear."

The soothing voice and touch she waited for came not, and turning round she found herself face to face with the fresh, trim beauty of Ida Bannatyne.

"I have been trying so long to come," said Ida, "but Ambrose claims all my afternoons."

"Pray stand on no ceremony with me, Ida. We lay aside our claims on others when we don this dress," replied Irene, picking off a white thread from her serge skirt.

"I had no idea furnishing was such a business," Ida went on. "But Ambrose is absurdly particular. He will have everything to his own pattern, like an

emperor, and that of course runs into time and money too."

Irene's forehead puckered at the mention of money. "I hope Ambrose is not spending more than he ought," she said.

"I presume he knows how much he will have to spend," Ida retorted, and began, with less than her usual judgment, to relate the episode of the black-list. "It was a trial, I assure you," she concluded, with a little laugh, "to be seen about with such a suspicious character."

"It must have been more than a trial to Ambrose, who has always hated owing money."

"I wish with all my heart he could pay for everything at once. But his affairs seem so unsettled."

"They ought not to be. He has quite enough to keep a wife in comfort," said Irene.

"Yes, I know he has ; but there's no certainty in his prospects. It worries me to think that at any moment our income may be cut down to a mere pittance. My uncle should have seen things better settled."

"They were settled as they are by the best and wisest of men years before you knew Ambrose. They were so settled with full knowledge of his character, and of mine."

Miss Bannatyne pressed the ferule of her sunshade against the bare floor and said nothing.

"Why cannot you trust me, Ida?" Irene resumed, with a slight movement towards her. "If you love Ambrose, you are surely willing to face some risk for him. Do you think that I, who love him too, would do anything to hurt him?"

Ida realised how much constraint Irene must have put upon her pride to make this advance, and for a second she was tempted to meet her half-way; but some words that had fallen from her aunt when they were upon this very question flashed into her mind. "A wife's happiness hangs more safely on signatures than sentiments," was Mrs. Doncaster's aphorism, and the memory of it effectually blocked the impulse of Ida's heart.

"If Ambrose were going into a city partnership," she answered frigidly, "a verbal promise would not be thought enough. Is our partnership to be of less account than that?"

"Oh, if you take the city view, I have nothing further to say," replied Irene drily. "I must give thought to it. I am glad you came; you have cleared the air for me."

Ida had scarcely left her when a letter from the secretary of the hospital was put into Irene's hands. Her heart sank when she saw it; a threat seemed ambushed in the very superscription. The Committee had been sitting that afternoon. She knew of enemies

upon it who had been waiting, ever since her last defeat, for a pretext to ruin her. Some of them had bowed to her that day on their way to the green table, and she wondered how long the farce of their smiles would be kept up before her. She opened the letter, and found full warrant for her misgivings. Unpacked from official verbiage, the mandate of the Committee was: "Pay debts or go." After the first shock Irene felt almost glad to have her difficulties crystallised into such sharpness before her. The problem had to be faced at once; she was spared further suspense.

She sat for a few minutes in thought, and then moved calmly to her duties. The wards were visited, the nurses' supper sat through, and the long prayers read without a quiver in her face or a break in her voice. For an hour she dictated letters to Eva Sumner, and at the stroke of ten bade her good-night, with a smile at the young girl's anxious eyes.

Eva went up to her bedroom and waited with ears strung tight for the sound of Irene's footfall in the next room. An hour passed and Irene had not come up. Then Eva stole downstairs. The sitting-room was in darkness, but as she passed the chapel she caught a faint glimmer through the glazed circle in the door. She looked in, and on one of the benches, beneath a yellow-tipped bud of gas, she saw Irene fast asleep, her chin upon her breast. Eva crept up to the children's

ward for some soup, set it to warm in Irene's room, and sat down on a bench outside the chapel door.

The languid quarter-hours trailed past, told off reluctantly by the Clock-tower chimes. Outside the sodden cries and staves of drunken song melted away, and Eva still sat on. At length a sound within the chapel startled back the drowsiness that was creeping over her. She peered in and saw Irene before the altar on her knees. Then, feeling her mistress safe and her own watchfulness superseded, she climbed the stairs and threw herself upon her bed. She was roused from a riot of dreams by the crowing of the cellar cocks below her windows and the level beams of dawn. She rose and stole downstairs, in time to see Irene leave the chapel and stride erect and resolute to her room. Then she went comforted to bed.

From the moment that Ida had declined to trust her, the stress in Irene's mind had been giving way. Almost unknown to herself, a decision had taken shape within her mind. But the conscience-crippled have shame of bare resolves unfledged with reasons, and Irene felt that she needed all the silent, sunless hours before her, to spend them wrestling in thought and prayer, ere she could firmly face the world of action. She had to satisfy herself of the claim of the divine, living voice within her, to overrule her promise to her dead father. She had to convince herself that, self apart, the ruin of

her own mission for life was a larger evil than the dashing of her nephew's hopes, and the darkening of his youth with an April cloud. Here there was little difficulty. The wreck of his schemes might well be but a pruning of young exuberance into higher fruitfulness; the wreck of hers was the destruction, total and irreparable, of the growth and fruitage of years—a catastrophe that would throw her friends into distress and gladden the faces of her enemies. But it took Irene long to justify to herself the breach of her solemn oath to her father, and the wounding of her nephew's love and trust in her. The rival forces in her mind went through many evolutions, in which self played a coruscating part, tilting now on this side, now on that, before conscience, satisfied, threw down its warder and hailed the victor.

Even then there was a moment in which Irene faltered. Suddenly she lifted her face from the cradle of her arms, and lo! the day had dawned. The sun shone through the painted windows and fell in little fields of crimson and sapphire upon the altarpiece before her—the sacred first-fruits of her nephew's art. It pictured Christ, the Helper, hastening down a steep white path hedged with standing corn, and followed by a train that straggled away into the gray distance. His face was one whereon the lines of power and thought, and of temptation lived through, were softened and

illuminated by the radiance of love and pity and presage of the kingdom of love. The sight of the picture brought upon Irene a surge of doubt and distress. Her memory, fresh as new-cut flowers, of the day when Ambrose had brought it to her and dedicated it with the glow of a mission upon him that should rank him with dead painter-saints, called up all her affection for him, and that again awoke her bitterness against him for his falling off, and her anger against her who had beguiled him. The tears gathered in Irene's eyes as she fastened them upon the Christ, and she sobbed "Ah, help me!" But the longer she gazed the farther off help seemed, till she turned her face away and rose to her feet. Then as her wearied nerves slowly recovered themselves, her anguish died away. Her resolve renewed its plumage, and she left the chapel, as Eva saw her, erect and resolute, to plunge her burning face and hands in water and straightway to give effect to her decision.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE JUDGMENT REVERSED

Elizabeth Trevor (Sister Irene) to Ambrose Trevor.

Tuesday.

"MY DEAR AMBROSE—I write this within an hour of sunrise, after a night of praying and wrestling for light. For weeks I have been encompassed by a cloud of trouble and perplexity; but have been loath to let it cast even a distant shadow on your happiness. Now it has grown past my control. My Society is heavily in debt, and creditors grow clamorous. My own resources are exhausted, my property loaded with mortgage almost to the last straw. I have appealed for help, but in vain. And now only one course can save the Society from dispersal and me from bankruptcy. This for myself I do not dread. Gladly would I greet the moment that should free me from this noontday life of fret, and open to me an evening of leisure and solemn thought under the quiet eaves of my country cottage. But I dare not think of myself alone. Hundreds are dependent on

me for livelihood, for usefulness, for relief. I cannot forsake them. Nor can I lightly draw off from my long struggle for the great principle, that the nurse is clothed with a holy office, and may not wring profit out of the exigencies of the sick. To surrender at this moment would be to give fresh victory to those for whom the care of the sick-bed is only a branch of trade.

“How shall I appeal to you, Ambrose? Once our souls were attuned one to the other, and I could feel assured that whatever aims, whatever thoughts, whatever conclusions found birth in my mind, would wake an echo in yours. But you have drifted away from me; I have lost the key to your affections and your thoughts. I know not even to what God you now own allegiance, whether to the great God of love and mercy, whom we once worshipped together, or only to some nebulous ‘not-ourselves’ that makes somehow—haphazardwise—for righteousness. Well, I will appeal to you in the name of the ‘Not-self.’ If I know aught of your character, I know this, that, however tempted, you will never turn your back on high and noble purposes to ransack the world for praise, profit, or happiness wherewith to load the altar of self. *Entbehren sollst Du!* Never in the wreck of creeds can you fall deaf to the voice of that command. You still own its validity, Ambrose. I call upon you to renounce; to renounce

for a season the luxury which you never prized for itself, the vulgar credit of the well-lined purse, which I have so often heard you contemn. I do not ask you to give up your marriage—no, nor even to defer it. If you love truly and are truly loved, a modest income, like your own, need be no bar to a happy union. A fear of poverty is not amongst the cowardices of love. But I must ask you to give up the idea of competing in luxury and freehandedness with those who know no other standard of distinction.

“The property I have I hold in trust to heaven for those that are in sickness and travail. To keep it from them would be to turn deaf ears to the divine voice I hear in my prayers and my dreams. I have given of my income till I have means for none but the sparest diet and the meanest dress, and could I have continued my work in virtue of these privations I would never have asked you to bear a share in them. Indeed I do not ask you to share them now, but only to renounce the showy fringe of life, until such time as I can see our Society solvent. Then, I solemnly promise, the income you have hitherto received from me shall be restored.—Your affectionate aunt, IRENE.”

Ambrose Trevor to Ida Bannatyne.

“DEAREST IDA—I have this moment received, full against my heart, this letter from my aunt, aimed at us

from behind the hedge of our trust in her. I have tried to make allowance for her, but cannot. It has staggered me, left me crippled. I cannot reason or resolve. Let me lean on your dear judgment, Ida, and accept what you decide. Shall I go plead with her? Or, if your pride rises against that, shall we marry soon, quietly, and come to live here at the studio on my small income? Or will you wait, one year, two years, till Time visits Irene with remorse? There is yet a fourth course open to us. Ah me! I can hardly force my mind to face it, or my pen to name it. I compel myself to think of no happiness but yours. I have won you on false pretences, trusting Irene (may God forgive her!). I leave everything in your hands. Look in the magic mirror of your happiness, and if it bids us part—I will bear it. For ever my heart is in thy keeping, to use it as thou wilt.

AMBROSE."

Ida Bannatyne to Ambrose Trevor.

Tuesday Evening.

"MY DEAR AMBROSE—I am so overwhelmed with pity for you that I cannot think of myself. What a crash of idols! You trusted her so implicitly. A stab in the dark, indeed. Dishonest is the only word for her letter. No worship of the 'Not-self' there, only the show of it. The whole is egoism, ruthless egoism, parading in nun's weeds. My cheek is aflame with

anger; I cannot write collectedly. And yet one must collect one's self. You throw decision upon me, a grievous burden of responsibility. Not your happiness, nor mine, may I consider. Only what is right. You are not a common man, who may gather happiness where he list and let the world go hang. You have gifts, and duties to match them; a mission lies staked out for you. If it is pain to you to be reminded of this, remember I only reflect your own light. Before I knew you I should not have reasoned thus. How to be faithful to your talents?—that is the question before us, and you bid me answer it for you. You praise my practicalness, and in virtue of that quality I see clearly—never have I seen anything more clearly—that we must part. It is our duty to renounce, not, as your aunt believes, as a moral gymnastic, but in order that your gifts may bear fruit for your fellows. You have not been used to poverty, or the sordid fret of making ends meet. And never shall you be made acquainted with it through me. I have too much reverence for your gifts to consent to sterilise them in that way. And waiting on the goodwill, save the mark, of your shattered idol, in hopes of her repentance, would that be less fatal to them? No, Ambrose, I cannot sanction our marriage, now or ever.

“Indeed, Ambrose, you have misconceived my character. I have tried to rise to your ideal of me, but

every day of our intercourse has borne it in upon me more and more strongly that I am not the mate for you. I am too bound up in the world, and its successes and judgments, to be able to stand serenely apart with you, and work out in patience and faith, through obloquy and neglect perhaps, the mission that your heart commands. I am what I was made—no heroine.

“We must part, Ambrose. Do not try to shake this decision, which has not been arrived at lightly, and which, once arrived at, is final. It is made in your interest and the world’s, and that it may find ample justification in the result no one will pray more earnestly and unremittingly than—Your devoted well-wisher,

IDA.”

Ambrose Trevor to Elizabeth Trevor.

Wednesday.

“You have wounded me almost to death. Never can I forgive you. I have trusted you implicitly, as your father trusted you when he passed away with a smile on his face and your promise in his ears. And yet you are perjured. Your sick, if they knew it, would rise in their beds and spurn your relief. What God is this, that bids you be a liar for his sake? I will none of him.

“I have broken my engagement—you have at least compassed that—and to-morrow leave for Rome, where

I hope to forget the world and its sham altruisms, and haply my own sorrow, in devotion and work for a juster God than him you serve. You are welcome to my money, the wages of your sin, but never look to hear from me again.

AMBROSE."

CHAPTER XXV

IRENE'S PUNISHMENT

"SHE is hopelessly worldly. I know it, Eva."

Irene brought her restless limbs to a moment's halt to discharge the words, and again began her aimless paces. The clouds parting had left her in a state of painful tension.

Eva looked up inquiringly from her writing, and swept her hand over her forehead—a gesture of her uncoiled days.

"Don't eye me that way, child," cried Irene. "No, nor that way either, Eva. I will not be pitied. Oh! I don't mean to be waspish. You must visit it on my nerves. I know not what has come to them."

"Who is worldly?" asked Eva mildly.

"Who? Why, who have I in my scales from dawn to sunset? Who but your fine-feathered friend, Ida."

"Worldly?" questioned Eva, in the tone of one facing a novel proposition; "yes, I suppose she is. But not so much as she seems, I think. A good deal of it is

put on through shame of showing her better instincts. The cynic conceals the prude."

"You defend her, of course," said Irene. "But I don't want your reading of her; I want the real Ida. Would she marry a poor man? There's a touchstone for her."

"Is it a fair test?" asked Eva. "Out of novels, surely a girl may refuse to marry into poverty and yet deserve our esteem. I don't think Ida would marry a poor man out of mere passion. He would have to conquer her mind as well as her heart."

"I could make Ambrose a poor man to-morrow," observed Irene.

"Oh, you would never do it!"

"Eva, I have done it!"

The entrance of the servant bringing letters forced Eva to keep a tight grip on the muscles that were straining to give expression to her concern. Irene pounced on the servant's tray, and with a muttered "At last," singled out a letter from the heap and tore it open. As she read it the flush on her face died into a livid, wrinkled pallor, and she sank into a chair, hissing "He is mad!"

Eva came and sat down by her side, her grave gray eyes full of tenderness. "From Ambrose," said Irene in a whisper. It was all she could do then to reward the young girl's devotion.

Soon she straightened herself in her chair and gave Eva a smile. "I knew I was right," she exclaimed. "She would not marry a poor man; she has broken the engagement."

"Oh, you will go to him at once," cried Eva, stretching out an imploring hand.

"I? Never!" Irene burst out. "He leaves for Rome to-morrow. Besides, he has flung me off with a curse."

"Then he is alone, indeed; poor Ambrose!" sighed Eva.

"Leave me, Eva, or I shall shock you," said Irene.

Eva was glad to be away and alone. The image of Trevor stricken and forsaken was burning itself into her senses. She felt that some one must go to him, if only to be near him and to watch him silently. His friend, her brother, was away no one knew where, and Eva tortured her brain to elicit from it some hint of a means whereby news might be obtained of the sufferer. At last in despair she put on her cloak, and drove off through the broiling streets—it was a day of stifling, intolerable heat—to see Ida. Arrived in Savile Row, however, she learnt from Mrs. Bland that their guest had suddenly left them that morning on a visit to the Doncasters. Eva was on the point of rushing back to the hospital without telling her mother anything of her anxiety, when Hugh came in mopping a beaded forehead. Eva ran to him and greeted him gaily.

"What wreathed smiles!" Hugh chirruped. "O absence, thou melting-pot of hearts!"

"I want you to do something for me, Hugh," said Eva.

"Oh, they were merchandise then," her brother cried, flicking her dimples. "Never shall I plumb the depths of womanhood."

Eva explained bluntly that she was relying on Hugh to take back to Trevor that afternoon a parcel of borrowed books, the deposit left from many a former visit of his.

Hugh's face fell. "What! in this heat, with the mercury at bursting point!" he cried, producing the wreck of a pocket thermometer which he had rashly shown to the noonday sun. "Do you want my blood to break bounds too? Do you wish me an epistaxis? I suppose you think it just the day for tapping claret!"

"Do be sober, Hugh. There's a guide to Rome, and three volumes on the Florentine school, which must go back to Mr. Trevor at once. At this moment I think I see him standing over a half-packed portmanteau, beating his memory for their whereabouts. Early to-morrow he leaves England."

"Eh? Then the match is off. Hurrah! I'll do anything for you, Eva; drink up Esil; no, to-day there would be no merit in that. Come, I'll walk to Chelsea for you, there!"

"See Mr. Trevor, if you can," Eva enjoined as she

handed him his parcel. "If not, get news of him somehow. We are anxious about him at the hospital."

"I will be a brother to him, my Eva. Oh, that I were John! Never did I covet Esau's place till now. Heaven send our Trevor is too far gone to know the difference. See, I am backed like John; my voice is no more the voice of Jacob," and Hugh brought back the dimples to Eva's face as he strode to the door and threw her a "good-bye" in burlesque of his brother.

He found Trevor away from home, but his inquiries and the sight of his card touched the trigger of the housekeeper's eloquence, and her anxiety about her master flamed forth in words.

"No breakfast touched, sir. Roaming the streets this cruel day, without a crumb inside him. At every knock, sir, I think I shall open to a stretcher. Oh, I do wish Mr. John were here, instead of hobnobbing with the heathen."

Hugh left her in mid-flow, promising to come again. He had not walked a hundred yards along the river wall, when he saw some one clinging to the railings opposite. He crossed the road and found it was Trevor. The artist glared at him for a moment with eyes that glowed like dull red embers, and then began to stumble homewards. Hugh followed close upon his heels, aghast, thinking "How shall I tell it to Eva?"

Trevor rambled on, now falteringly, now in short,

quick rushes, breaking out into snatches of song, defying phantom enemies, and punishing the trees and railings as he passed them with his walking-stick. Ten yards from his door he stopped breathless, with his hands clutching at his collar. Hugh thought he would fall and ran up to him, but the artist flung him aside, and stumbled up to the studio door. Then he fell heavily upon the step, purple and stertorous. Hugh's hand was upon him in an instant. A touch of the arid, burning skin was enough to convince him of the mistake he had fallen into. "Never saw sunstroke before," was his excuse to himself.

He pealed at the bell, and called loudly for cold water. Bucket after bucket he emptied upon his senseless patient, till every rag upon him was soaked, and the water lay in pools along fifty yards of thirsty gutter. As soon as he saw a sign of revival he carried him indoors, and put him to bed, still unconscious. Then he despatched the housekeeper for Dr. Bland, and went back to sit in the darkened room.

Late in the afternoon, as Irene, worn out with ceaseless movement, was resting in her chair and gazing blankly at her nephew's letter, Dr. Bland was ushered in upon her. She started to her feet, scenting trouble. She thought he had come from Ida to browbeat her, and braced herself up to receive his onset. But at the sight of his suavity her spines fell.

"I must crave your forgiveness, dear lady," he said ; "you see a man at odds with his mission. I am the bearer of bad news, a *rôle* I detest. Oh, if one could only play always in the register of smiles !"

"For Heaven's sake, do not torture me," cried Irene. "Let me hear your worst."

"I have just left your nephew's bedside," said Dr. Bland. "He is ill !"

"Ill ?" she echoed hoarsely.

"Will you come to him ? My carriage is here."

"Why should I go to him ?" she broke out. "He has behaved brutally to me. He cannot wish to see me."

"Do you wish to see him ?" asked Dr. Bland—"to see him alive ? It is perhaps your last chance."

"What !" she cried. "Nonsense, you only come here to frighten me. He cannot be ill. See, not ten hours ago he could write me this. No, I cannot show it you ; it is too atrocious. He must have taken leave of his senses to write it."

"His senses have left him now," said Dr. Bland quietly. "He must have tramped about for hours fasting in this heat. The sun caught him, and he fell down unconscious before his very door. Luckily Hugh Sumner was there at the moment, sent by our good, anxious little Eva. But for his opportune help, your nephew must have expired on his own doorstep."

Immediate danger is past, but his life is still in the gravest peril. Will you come?"

Irene was now all calmness. The thought of a sick-bed was a trumpet-tongue to her scattered forces. She silently put on her cloak and bonnet and accompanied Dr. Bland to his carriage.

In the corridor Eva ran up to her with a "What can I do?" Irene let fall a kiss upon her forehead and said, "Nothing but pray, dear child; ask that your faithfulness be rewarded;" which oracular injunction was all that Eva's anxiety had to ply its teeth upon until the morrow.

Trevor was still unconscious when they arrived, but the physician pronounced him better, and in answer to Irene's urgent appeals, held out hope that he might be moved to her own room at the hospital in the morning.

"With Hugh's approval, of course," added Dr. Bland, gazing benignantly at his step-son. "It's his case, you know; nothing must be done to imperil the first feather in his cap. Till morning, then."

Irene watched by her nephew's bedside through the slow, silent hours, only rising from her knees to bring him food or adjust the ice-cap to his shaven head. Sad and heart-sickening as had been the scenes she had passed through, this night eclipsed them all in the long cruelty of its strain upon her broken nerves. At length the tardy morning came, with the welcome rattle of

milk-cans and the postman's joyous *reveille* down the drowsy street. By the time Dr. Bland and Hugh arrived, Irene had everything in readiness for the move. "The very moment for it," said Dr. Bland. "Any minute he may become conscious, and then perhaps he might have an amendment to propose."

They carried him in his blankets to the carriage, and Irene took her place beside him, while Hugh sat opposite with his hand on Trevor's pulse. So they moved slowly and anxiously through the interminable streets. As they were passing Queen Anne's Gate Irene gave a sudden start. Hugh followed the line of her eyes and saw a tall and handsome pair—lovers they looked—shaking hands and smiling a gay good-bye.

"Surely that is Miss Bannatyne?" Irene said grimly.

"Yes, and my friend Sir Eric Armstrong."

And then they both turned their eyes to the silent, senseless figure lying back amongst the blankets.

CHAPTER XXVI

A SHUFFLING OF CARDS

"THEY are in such grim earnest, the Savile Row set," said Ida to Mrs. Doncaster on the first evening of her visit. "They seize upon this doll we call life, and in their zeal to do their duty by it, they strip it in search of maker's name and price, peer into its works, analyse it with lens and test-tube, and wrangle over their finds from morning until night. And after all they are not so happy as we, who take our doll as we find it, make the best of it, and ask no questions."

"We are experts at living, remember," observed Mrs. Doncaster complacently. "We lived through the childish inquisitive stage when your friends' ancestors were hewing our wood and drawing our water. We soon found that life loses its charm the moment you catechise it. Some day your friends will learn the same. Meanwhile it is entertaining to watch their struggles. It has been an experience for you, Ida."

"Yes," said Ida; "I feel just like one returning from

the mountains. One enjoys the restful life among good simple people and romantic outlooks for a month or two, then finds that one has not the health or the temper to live there always, and so comes back with a new relish for home. Yes, civilisation spoils one for Arcadia."

"And your fluting shepherd?" asked Mrs. Doncaster.

"Ah, I am glad to have known him, aunt!" exclaimed Ida. "All my life I shall keep in my heart a corner of gratitude for Mr. Trevor. The world, I am sure, never held a gentler or purer spirit."

"What, Ida, are you in love with him still?"

"No, no, aunt. I never was that quite, and never pretended to be, even to him. No, I am glad not to marry him. It would have made too vast a call on me. He does not tease out life with needles like the rest, but he takes it solemnly—oh, so solemnly. To be his wife would be one long religious exercise. The thought of it scared me."

"You paint a prig."

"No, I should not call him that. He may seem so at first, but not when you know him. He never thinks of himself, or puts himself on view. I loathe a prig, whether the culture that he struts in be bodily or mental. Your Piccadilly pouter is as obnoxious to me as your Oxford fantail."

"There. I scent Savile Row," said Mrs. Doncaster. "You have not come off unscathed, niece."

"Possibly not," replied Ida. "One cannot be much with Ambrose Trevor without getting some views modified. No, aunt, he does not preach at you. He is always seeking your point of view, making allowance for you. And yet all the while you cannot help feeling how much he expects of you. Ah, he must have seen that I am not the wife for him. That thought consoles me; he will not suffer."

"I would not worry myself about it, Ida," said Mrs. Doncaster wearily. "The man lost his money and could not marry, and there's an end of him. It was a poor match at the best. For Heaven's sake, don't fall into hysterics over it, or I shall be sorry I ever countenanced your staying in Savile Row;" and Mrs. Doncaster closed her eyes and sank back deliberately amongst her cushions.

The next morning Ida, in her anxiety at hearing no news of Trevor—she was prepared for anything from him but silence—started off after breakfast to walk to Savile Row. As she crossed Birdcage Walk she caught sight of Eric Armstrong striding wearily in her direction, his eyes on the ground. He did not see her till he was close up to her, and the shimmer of her white skirt floated into his field of vision. Ida had time to note the disordered necktie, the soiled and

crumpled linen, and the general want of repair of one who has failed to put himself under the deft hands of sleep. Her heart sank as she watched him.

"Oh, Eric," she cried, "sowing wild oats still?"

Armstrong lost his limpness as he took her hand, and his features freshened like the leaves of a thirsty plant under the watering-pot. "No; tame ones this time, on my honour," he exclaimed; "such tame ones too. I can look you in the face. My night may have played havoc with me, but I shall turn my latchkey with a good conscience. Oh, it's you that are responsible. I have passed my night in the House. The whips' messenger caught me on the brink of bed after a night at the play. Only your name on my tongue kept at bay the devil's language."

"Poor fellow!" Ida murmured.

"Oh, I don't mean to grumble," said Eric; "but for the life of me I cannot see what good I get from it all. Another man would do just as well as I; yes, and better. One soon gets tired of being moved from square to square even on the most splendid chess-board. There is only one thing that would have completely reconciled me to it."

"Are you not happy, really?" asked Ida.

"Now I am," cried Eric, "when you look and speak like that, but at other times I am the most wretched dog alive. I try to amuse myself, but the whole thing is a weariness. I have pleasure in nothing."

"Poor fellow!" Ida murmured again.

"I wish to Heaven you were married and——"

"I am not going to be married," said Ida demurely.

Eric's surprise and delight at the news did not break bounds at once. There was a bar of silence, and then the baton waved and his whole nerve-orchestra broke forth into a jubilant "Tutti." His excitement coursed into every muscle. A passer-by, startled by the incongruity of such radiance of joy disporting itself under a mourning hat-band, hung near them open-mouthed, till, suddenly realising that he was intruding on a delicate situation, he coloured and hurried on.

"When may I come and see you?" Eric asked, when he had subsided into articulateness.

"Mrs. Doncaster takes me with her to Scotland next week," said Ida; "I am staying with her now. We shall probably be back in November."

"What, wait to see you till then!" cried Eric. "Nonsense. I shall call to-morrow."

Had Miss Bannatyne had eyes for aught but Eric, she would have been spared her walk to Savile Row, for the latest news of her discarded lover was just then slowly driven by. But the carriage with its burden of anxiety passed unnoticed, and Ida did not know what had happened till she heard it recounted in awed whispers by Mrs. Bland.

Trevor's stupor lasted all that day. Sister Irene

gave up her room to him, and tended him herself. Stricken with remorse, she bent her shoulders to the burden as a penance which she might not shirk or share. There were moments when the sight of the wounded life before her, and the scalding thought that it was on her that the guilt of it lay, filled her with a shuddering longing to break away, to flee anywhere, so she might only be out of sight of him; but she angrily forced the impulse down and chained herself to her task.

At sundown Trevor began to move uneasily and to mutter to himself. An hour later he was raving.

"Is she come yet?" he asked.

"I am here, dear Ambrose," Irene said gently, taking his dry hand in hers.

"Go away, you black hag," he shrieked, tossing her hand away from him, "get you gone, devil. I want my white-winged angel. Oh, when will she come? Oh, Ida, Ida, Ida."

"Wait for the morning, Ambrose," said Irene, trying in vain to calm him. "Perhaps she will come in the morning."

"Liar!" cried Trevor. "There will be no morning. I saw the sun set for ever. It went down in blood. The ground shook, and the houses reeled, and the bells pealed, and hell broke loose, cackling. Ida sat aloft, throned, beckoning to me. But the devils choked me, and the sun vanished in a tide of blood, and all was

darkness, darkness for ever. . . . I hear a cab. Ida come at last. She is on the stairs—at the door. I hear her footsteps amongst the lilies. Oh, my lily Ida. Why can't you let her in, hell-hound? Don't go away, Ida. I am coming to you ;” and he threw off the coverlet and would have leapt out of bed had not Irene's firm hands restrained him.

He was silent for a few seconds, and then he began again. “Oh, my snow-crowned Ida, let me climb and lay my forehead against thy coolness ; let me kiss thy brow of snow. Thy lips are white too. What have they done to thee, Ida darling? And they used to be so red. You were chary of your kisses, Ida. Irene they call her—Irene, Peace—ha, ha! No, no, no, not peace, but a sword.”

As the slow hours dragged on he grew more and more violent. He pronounced the room to be in flames and shrieked aloud for help. He could not be kept in bed for five minutes together, but was for ever leaping out in terror and tearing madly at the locked door. At last Irene was compelled to ring for help ; but the sight of new faces only added fuel to his fury, and at sunrise Dr. Bland was sent for. He came and drugged his patient into a restless, moaning sleep.

When Trevor awoke the violence and the terror were gone, but now he chattered incessantly to himself and mouthed out scraps of verse.

“Auch ich war in Arkadien geboren,” he chanted ;
“doch Thränen gab der kurze Lenz mir nur.” Then to
himself, “Idiot! did you look for no April showers?
Where were your roses without them? What! you
thought your soul would blossom without tears?

“Wer nie sein Brod mit Thränen ass,
Der kennt Euch nicht, Ihr himmlischen Mächte.

Ay, scare the devil with your weeping.

“Des Lebens Mai blüht einmal und nicht wieder,
Mir hat er abgeblüht.
Der stille Gott—O weinet, meine Brüder—

A brisk shower, my hearties.

“Der stille Gott taucht meine Fackel nieder,
Und die Erscheinung flieht.

Oh, you went down in blood, my peerless vision.

“Empfange meinen Vollmachtbrief zum Glücke,
Furchtbare Ewigkeit ;

Eternity! Horrible Eternity ; how live it through
without her ?

“Ich bring’ ihn unerbrochen dir zurücke,
Ich weiss nichts von Glückseligkeit.”

Trevor’s aberration lasted, with phases that were as
changeful as an April sky, into the second week. Dr.
Bland reported improvement every day, but shook his
head over the future. “The nervous system has not
yet been put together,” he said, “that would keep time
after such a shaking.” “A brain that has been scalded

almost to death in its own blood is never likely to act calmly again," was another of his fanciful prognoses.

"Will he never paint any more?" asked Sister Irene, who longed to see the old Ambrose restored line for line, and was as eager now about his interest in his art as she had once been careless of it.

"Paint, madam!" retorted Dr. Bland. "Take him into the country and set him to paint your palings to the tint of an olive. Monochrome in the open air is my utmost allowance for him. Pack up his palettes, and, above all, his palette knives and his razors, and let his studio for a year."

Dr. Bland's words set Irene longing for the country, and as soon as her nephew was equal to the journey, she moved him down into Kent. Her month of anxiety and remorse had aged her by ten years in feature and in spirit. Sorrow in its passage had robbed both of their resilience, and left them wrinkled. Having lost her self-command, she felt unfit to command others, and she could now surrender, almost with joyfulness, the place and power which she had once clung to as a necessity of life. St. Paul's Hospital was rid of her for ever.

CHAPTER XXVII

BY THE COAST OF KENT

"NOT love, nor sorrow, but death." Irene had heard her nephew breathe out the words in every tone in the gamut of despair, till the sound of them set her every nerve a-quiver. They were the "Leitmotif" that invariably sounded the re-entry of the deep gloom which was now his prevailing mood. Sometimes a look almost of happiness flickered over his thin worn face, as he gazed across the valley to the hamlet that nestled amongst trees on the crest of the opposite slope, or watched the swallows wheeling through the still, fragrant air; but sooner or later his chin dropped and Irene heard him murmur, "Not love, not sorrow, only death."

"How calm and clear it is!" she said to him one afternoon as they sat in front of the cottage in the shade of its deep eaves. "One can almost count the windows of the old house. How I long to live there again!"

Trevor turned round a languid head and smiled at her.

"We might, perhaps, in a year or two, if we are

careful. I cannot bear to think of strangers making their home there. We will turn the library into a studio, Ambrose."

"Plan nothing for me, aunt. My life is done. I shall never paint again. What is there to paint? Oh, how I have yearned after the hidden beauty, the veiled soul of the universe! Love would not raise the veil, nor sorrow. And yet what sorrow could have lifted it if mine did not?"

"Forgive me, Ambrose," begged Irene for the hundredth time.

"I have long forgiven you ; you were but the tool of destiny. Love failed me and sorrow. And now there remains but death, the greatest of the three. When I lie over there," and he pointed across the valley to the burial-place of his fathers, "lay me in the sunlight, aunt, not under the yew—when I lie there, then surely the veil will have risen."

"Try not to give way to such thoughts, dear Ambrose," said Irene gently. "Think of them as morbid—phantoms begotten of ill-health. Surely there is beauty enough in the world. Look at the corn-field, how it changes colour and deepens into loveliness as it is touched by the breeze and the shadows of the drifting clouds. See how yon gray tower stands out against the elms. Or come, we will walk to the headland and watch the endless glimmer of the sea. When God has

spread such a feast before you, why yearn after what it pleases Him to hide?"

"He who gave the feast, aunt, gave the yearning."

"Not all the longings of man's heart are from Heaven, Ambrose."

"Is earth beautiful only to delight the eye? Is its beauty the expression of nothing, think you? One loves to watch a lovely face, but soon comes the longing to have speech with the soul that informs it. If there be no soul to love behind it, then is the loveliness a fraud—a *lusus Naturæ*. Is all this beauty of the world a sport of nature too? Nay, there lives a soul of truth beneath it, and some day we shall see it, even though we must die first."

Sister Irene's cottage lay within a summer evening's walk of the famed bulwark of white cliffs that stretches from Deal to Dover. From her door you might hear the moaning of the wires which bring to England swift tidings from half the world, and yet, gazing eastward across the wind-swept plateau from the screen of firs behind the house, you could easily fancy yourself back in happy dawdling days ere brains had grown tender under the flail of events. The cottage had been built a century back as a dower-house on the seaward limit of the Trevor estates. Though heavily encumbered, every field in the broad valley that lay between it and the manor-house where she had passed her youth was Irene's.

She knew them all by heart, with their stunted hedgerows and the trees cuddling together for warmth in the sheltered dips. Scarce a day of her girlhood had passed but she had tripped into the valley, climbed the steep lanes, and crossed the breezy upland, to draw in vigour of body and freshness of thought from the sight and sound of the waves and their chill breath. And now, whenever she could leave her nephew, she took the same path and sought the same cliffs in the hope of gaining from their wide horizon a healthier view of her own griefs. But they were as yet too close to her to fall into due perspective, and she brought back to her home the same tenseness of feature with which she had left it. The natives of this, the healthiest corner of England, with whom the rosiness of youth glides leisurely into the clear russet of old age, found it hard to realise that the pale, gray-haired woman who passed them on the cliffs, her long cloak fluttering in the wind, and her stern, set face bent seawards, was the same person as the lithe and eager-footed girl who stood there twenty years before with the rapture of high purpose in her young eyes.

When Irene had been at the cottage a fortnight she sent for Eva Sumner. "Come, and bring some of your cheerfulness with you, dear Eva," she wrote. "Heaven knows we need it. Ambrose is better in health—this air is balm to those born in it—but he is still little more than a skeleton, and his mind is sadly unhinged.

He sits all day with his hands before him gazing at vacancy, sighing heart-brokenly and praying for death. It is in vain I try to interest him, and at last I am beginning to feel his gloom infecting me. We are the worst possible companions for each other. The strain too of watching him from morn to night is wearing me out. If you can sacrifice yourself for a season, come."

Eva arrived at the cottage on the same day that she received Irene's summons, her head stuffed with plans for Trevor's benefit. "You will have to mend his ruts—with stones, little woman," were Dr. Bland's last words to her. "He will hate you for it, but on this occasion the egoism of wishing to please must be snubbed. I do not like this passion of his for death. I daresay it is only Platonic, but one can never tell. I should not be surprised to hear any day that he had done himself a mischief."

Trevor's eyebrows twitched into a frown at the sight of Eva's boxes, and when a whole apparatus of scientific research was unpacked before him his features signalled an almost comical dismay. Evidently the old-world atmosphere which had seemed so soothing to his tortured nerves was to be invaded by the prying gusts of the modern spirit. The next morning Eva confronted him at breakfast with a bustling vivacity, which was as alien to her nature as it was antagonistic to his. She was new to the part and overacted it; but enough

of gentle instinct still survived in Trevor to prevent his showing how much it grated on him. He kept a placid skin over his sufferings.

After breakfast he was loaded with collecting-boxes and dragged off to hunt in woods and sleepy pools for the insects and grubs that Eva declared essential for the resumption of her inquiry into the life-history of the ciliated cell. The afternoon she granted him for his own uses, except when she called to him through the jasmine sprays to come in and peer through the microscope at some especially marvellous product of their morning's ramble. After dinner she pounced upon him again, and led him through the fields or along the dusty highways, forcing him ever and anon to ransack the lumber of his mind for the solution to some metaphysical conundrum.

This treatment, grimly persevered in for a week, had a marked effect on Trevor's health. He grew daily less lethargic, and his relapses into melancholy were less frequent and less prolonged. He even gave signs of becoming reconciled to the treatment, which in a nervous case is one of the best testimonies to its efficacy. The pursuit of grubs was no longer to be reckoned amongst the thraldoms of hospitality.

There had been a succession of boisterous days which made the telegraph wires shriek in harmonics, when suddenly the clouds lifted and the wind fell. Irene,

coming in from her afternoon upon the cliffs, announced that the vessels that had been weather-bound by fifties in the Downs were weighing anchor and setting off down Channel.

"You must take Eva to see them," she said. "It is a sight to carry to one's grave."

Trevor was aghast at the proposal.

"*Oh, I dare not,*" he cried anxiously. "*I dread looking from a height. I have lost command of myself.*"

Eva, full of Dr. Bland's maxims, stiffened her back and would hear of no denial.

Irene seconded her. "Do try and regain control of your nerves, Ambrose," she said. "Think of them as a naughty child. The more you show your weakness the more they will take advantage of you. Pray don't let them bully you."

Trevor gave way resignedly and went for his hat. "For Heaven's sake, keep watch on him," was Irene's parting injunction to Eva.

In half an hour they were standing upon the cliffs with a magical scene before their eyes. As far as they could see a glass-green sea flowed in soft ripples, dappled here and there with little mirrors of still water, till it deepened into a band of azure on the horizon. Beneath them an endless procession of ships, with all their white sails set, glided past with slow solemn motion, like the figures in a grand pageant. A white-

hulled steamer threading its way through them seemed only the more to emphasise the stateliness of their march. In the far misty distance rose the French cliffs, with here and there a sail of dazzling whiteness picked out against them by the sun. The silence was unbroken except by the soft whisper of the sea and the beat of oars from a passing boat. A dozen martins were circling *about the cliffs*; on a sloping field inland a team of horses stood motionless beside a loaded harvest waggon; and over the whole the low autumn sun threw such a golden glamour that it seemed like a dream of another world.

Eva and Trevor stood watching the scene in silence for many minutes. At length she heard him murmur, "Souls that have been kept waiting like mine sailing through the gates of Heaven!"

She glanced up at him and saw upon his face a look that startled her. Dr. Bland's warnings, which with Trevor's improved spirits had almost faded from her mind, came rushing back upon her, and she knew that she must at once get him away from the cliff.

"Truly it is a wonderful sight," she said, forcing her voice to counterfeit calmness. "Come, we shall see it better from the fields."

She put her arm through his as she spoke and tried to draw him away, but he seemed neither to feel its pressure nor to hear her voice. His eyes were still fixed intently on the sea beneath.

"Ah," he sighed, "that I were lying there with the waves for a coverlet! Three rounds only of a minute hand and——"

Eva thought she felt him moving toward the cliff's edge, and clutched his arm with a wild cry, "For Heaven's sake, dearest Ambrose."

He turned round to her with a dazed face, like one awakened out of sleep. Then he looked at the brow of the cliff and the sea, and back again at her. Her large eyes were fixed upon him dry with terror, but as he gazed the moisture gathered in them, and soon he saw all her hoarded love for him struggling, like a rainbow, through her tears.

"Dear little woman," he said, smiling at her and gently pressing the hands that still maintained their clasp upon his arm.

At that Eva broke down and burst into sobs. Trevor was now quite himself again, and he began to soothe and reassure her with caressing words.

"Oh, Ambrose, it was cruel of you," was all she could say.

"What! did you think I wished to rush away from you into the cold arms of death?" he cried. "For a moment, perhaps, I may have been tempted, but now, little one, have no fear of me. I will not frighten you again. I have longed for Death and wooed her, but she was deaf to my entreaties; and now the longing has

passed away. Your sweet sympathy has killed it. Dear Eva! Nay, I care not to die, with Death so hard to please. What! leave you, Eva! Nay, sob no more, little woman. I am well and sound again; once more my brain is out of tangle. We will sweep away the past and live in loving friendship as we did before."

He stopped suddenly, dropped her hand, and turned his face to the sea. "Oh, Ida, dear friend, forgive me. Do not think I am not still loyal to thee, the top of womanhood. Beautiful thou art and good, with health coursing through every veinlet of body and brain. But I renounce thee. Thou wert not for me, the dreamer. Be thou mother of English boys, active, resolute, living up to the truth they know. For there are those who seek truth, and those who use it nobly when found. One would give his life to drag an atom from its mine, another to keep an atom unsullied. Surely they are brothers—brothers working together for one God. Come, Eva, let us go home; Irene will be expecting us."

CHAPTER XXVIII

CONCLUSION

Ida Armstrong to Eva Sumner.

EASTMERE ABBEY.

“MY DEAR LITTLE EVA—Many thanks for the pamphlet. Who ever would have dreamt of you as an author? I have read nothing of the sort before, but Ambrose’s illustrations make it quite clear, and there seems no reason why the meanest intellect should not become completely intimate with the ciliated cell. Eric caught me reading it, perpetrated an atrocious pun, which I will not retail, and carried it off to the library. I saw him yawning over it, but he afterwards remarked to me that he had often run the gauntlet of a row of cells at Eton, and from the memory of the flick of the towels on his bare back he could easily understand how ciliated cells made short work of all such cheeky particles as came their way.

“I am so pleased that Ambrose has again taken up his pencil, or whatever it is with which one draws on stone.

I fear this sort of work gives his imagination little scope—he has to content himself with what he used to call the lower truth—but it must add an interest to his life and take his mind off himself. I was rejoiced to hear my uncle confess the other day that he had taken too gloomy a view of his prospects. ‘I should have remembered,’ he said in his quaint way, ‘that it is of the essence of genius to defy prognosis.’

“We are here for the Easter holidays, delighted to be away from our stuffy London house. We had had enough of second-hand air. Eric is as a boy home from school, singing the whole day, like Chaucer’s curly-pated squire, except when he is scolding me. This is our first stay here, and consequently the first opportunity we have had of living with ‘the’ picture. It is indeed a picture to live with. It is always preaching at me, and yet I grow more in love with it every day. Pray tell Ambrose this; the thanks I wrote him after our marriage I remember as wofully stilted, though I racked my brain for words on a level with my gratitude. Eric is not a whit less enthusiastic about it than I am. Yesterday I found him standing before it. He pretended to be jealous—he always is a little jealous of my admiration for Ambrose—and complained that I never looked at him like that. ‘No,’ I replied, ‘that is my posterity expression: I have to economise it.’—‘Rubbish!’ he cried (husbands so soon moult their courting feathers),

‘rubbish! you were never as beautiful as that. It’s only Trevor’s flattery.’—‘Possibly,’ I answered; ‘it’s an art he certainly understands a great deal better than you.’ It took me half an hour to coax him into good humour again. What a mistake it is saying sharp things! I am always resolving never to do it again. *They* are like a surgeon’s cut, much sooner made than mended.

“I have a superstition about that picture, Eva. In this dear old-fashioned place, which always seems to me to have been laid up in lavender for generations, one forgets the Savile Row teaching and grows superstitious again. My present misbelief is that Ambrose will never be happy and well again till he finishes the picture. I trace all his troubles to his unfortunate neglect of those two goddesses: you know what vindictive creatures they were. Do try and persuade him to come and stay with us at Whitsuntide. A few mornings’ work, and the goddesses will never plague him again. I, too, shall escape the necessity of having to explain the whole history of the picture to Eric’s female relatives and all the parsons’ ladies of the neighbourhood. I cannot get them to understand it as it is, and I dare not startle their weak nerves by reading them the *Byleaf* legend. Eric’s maiden aunt, the sole remaining one, who, says Eric, ought to have had the decency to die like her sisters when he was in such dire want of her money,—this aunt won’t have it

that Aphrodite is a portrait of me. She insists that the likeness must be purely accidental. 'Why, my dear, she looks no better than she should be,' she actually said to me—this of Ambrose's innocence personified. 'All of us are that, dear aunt,' I answered mildly, only to be met with an unanswerable 'Pish!' So do persuade Ambrose to take his brush in hand again and come and finish off my rivals. If he will do it, I have confidence that all will henceforth go well with him. And with you too, Eva dear. He is so good and true, and deserves so to be happy. You alone can make him so, I am convinced. Patience, Eva, all will come right. There are happy days in store for you.

"As for me, I have made my bed. *Ich grolle nicht*. It is a warm, cosy, luxurious nest enough—a solid mahogany four-poster, with a heavy tester that keeps even one's dreams from soaring. And yet I confess I find myself sometimes longing for a day of magic carpet, to take me away out of this heavy respectable air into the exhilarating freedom of fresh thoughts and wider views. Ah, we are strange creatures, Eva. We weary alike of rest and unrest, of having and of craving. It is a question of nerves, I suppose. My Eric, luckily, has no nerves, in that sense at least. When I ask him if he is happy he stares at me: 'Of course, I have never been anything else.'—'Why, you told me once you were the most miserable dog alive.'—'A mere *façon de parler*,

my dear.' And that is all the praise one gets for having, out of the goodness of one's heart, taken pity on a forlorn bachelor. I am sure that Ambrose when he marries will never forget to give credit to the source and partner of his happiness. He will be a lover to the end of his life. I see you, Eva, in my musings, journeying by his side, soothing and inspiring him, till in the end you reach together the summits where man and his endeavour are crowned with the love and reverence of his kind.—Ever yours, my Eva, IDA ARMSTRONG."

THE END

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